

## GREAT EXPECTATIONS

The kids can't wait! They're focused on one thing and one thing only: today is Christmas, and they just can't wait to get at those presents! We adults, of course, being more mature, patiently explain to them that they need to learn to wait for some things because learning to delay gratification is an important part of growing up. Of course, right after we tell them that we go to the store and charge things we can't afford to pay for right now because we just can't wait either.

We all have a problem with waiting. The children of Israel had the same problem. God had promised them a Messiah, a Savior who would one day come and establish a kingdom for his people. And as they waited for their Messiah, like kids waiting for Christmas, they tried to imagine what he would be like, and what he would do when he came. Some of them thought he would be a warrior king, a new David who would restore Israel to a place of prominence among the nations. But most of them thought Messiah would be a divine being--God or an angel--who would come down to earth in order to punish the wicked people and reward the righteous ones. Naturally, they considered themselves to be the righteous ones and their enemies to be the wicked ones; it's always a lot easier to imagine that sin is the other person's problem and not your own. And since that's how they thought, they couldn't wait for the judge to come. Bring it on, Lord! Give those jerks what they deserve, and lead us to the goodies! Like kids waiting for Christmas, they had great expectations.

But prophets like Amos kept showing up like a skunk at the garden party and saying things like, *"Woe to you who long for the day of the Lord! Why do you long for the day of the Lord? That day will be darkness, not light!"* You see, for centuries the Israelites had been ignoring God's commandments and worshipping pagan gods who had no problem with their sins. They saw no need to repent and ask God for forgiveness. He sent prophet after prophet to warn them what would happen if they didn't repent, but they ignored them, hardened their hearts against repentance and went on sinning. And so the last thing the Israelites needed was a righteous judge. A righteous judge is only good for you when you're righteous yourself, and the Israelites were far from righteous.

So the Israelites dreamed dreams of glory while they sped down the road to perdition. But the piper finally had to be paid. God sent Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon to invade Judea, breach the walls of Jerusalem, slaughter most of the inhabitants and haul the rest of them off to Babylon as prisoners of war. And there, in Babylon, they languished for decades, watching and waiting for Messiah to come and bail them out. They knew He wouldn't abandon them; they just didn't know when He would act. And finally, God said *"Enough!"* Enough waiting, enough wondering. The time has come; the time is full. The time is here.

And those of you who expected a divine judge who would punish sin and wickedness were right. That's exactly what He came to do. But the sin and wickedness he came to punish was YOUR sin and wickedness. You see, you're no better than your enemies—if

fact if anything, you're worse. You're sinful and unrepentant and you deserve nothing but death for the things you've thought and said and done.

Well! That certainly wasn't what they were expecting. But as their hearts sank under the crushing knowledge of their sins, God said: Don't despair: I'm not going to punish YOU for your sins. Your Messiah is going to take all of your sins onto Himself just like they were his own, and then he's going to pay the penalty for them all. And in return, he's going to give you all his righteousness and his innocence and his purity. I'm going to judge him for the crimes you committed so that you can go free. And he's going to die for you so that you can live. That's what the heavenly judge you were expecting is going to do for you.

And those of you who expected him to be a king: you were right too. He is going to be a king—a king who will lead you to victory over your enemies. Not by conquering your human enemies, who are no worse than you are, but by conquering your real enemies: sin and death and Satan. He is going to vanquish them forever by taking away sin, by destroying death, and by crushing the head of your real enemy, Satan, once and for all, so that you can be free.

Now this was quite a bit to absorb. It was good news, no doubt, but it flew in the face of all their expectations. It's tough to be told that you're just as sinful as the people you hate and that you all deserve nothing but death. And once you've absorbed that, it's next to impossible to believe that God is really offering you complete exoneration at no cost to yourself. Sounds like a free lunch and you know what they say about free lunches. But God said it was so and God doesn't lie. In any case, their expectations were on target: Messiah would be a divine judge, and Messiah would also be a powerful king.

Then God threw another curve ball at them: this divine judge and king has *come in the form of a little child*.

Now this didn't compute at all. When you think of a child, you don't think of judgment and power and conquest and kingship! A child is tiny and helpless, not big and powerful! "Ah," God said, "*but my ways are not your ways! Look deeply into the Scriptures and you will see my plan. I could have chosen to conquer your enemies by force, but I chose instead to conquer them through love*" "*And so unto us a child is born, and the government will be on his shoulders.*"

And how will this child govern? First of all he will be a Wonderful Counselor. His counsel will not consist of human wisdom, but of the wisdom of God. It will seem like foolishness to the wise and learned, but little children will understand it. He will be ignored and rejected by many, but he will deliver the eternal truths of God to those who believe in Him. I, God, in the Person of the Holy Spirit, will be your Counselor.

He will also be Mighty God. Though a child, He will have God's power about him. He will be so mighty that he will be able to absorb all the evil that is hurled against him until there is no more evil left to hurl. He will possess infinite power, but it will be a power made perfect in weakness.

And by God's mysterious provision, this child will be a Father to us. He will provide for us, protect us and love us with an everlasting love. Once we have Him, we will need no other source of life and blessing.

Finally, he will be a Prince of Peace. Not a war-maker like other kings, but a peace-bringer. He will give us a peace which is not merely the absence of conflict with one another, but a peace with God that restores us and heals us. In His peace, his *shalom*, we will become what we were originally designed to be.

That is what this child will bring and that is how he will govern us: with eternal truth, infinite power, a father's love and divine peace. In God's infinite and yet mysterious wisdom, he will be a king who comes to serve, a child who will be a father, a warrior who brings peace, and a human counselor who brings divine wisdom. Though he himself is immortal, he will die for his people, so that they can live forever.

And the Kingdom he will establish will be so great that heaven itself will not be able to contain it! It will spill out of heaven into the hearts of men and women and children everywhere, so that they will rejoice and sing along with all the angels in heaven: Joy to the world; the Lord is come!

You know, the kids have it right. Their eager hearts should be our models! We should pray to God to fill our hearts with the same kind of great expectations as they have, because Jesus wants us to yearn for him to come again just like children yearn for Christmas every year, and then rejoice when it finally arrives.

And today we can do just that, because the waiting is over and Christmas is here! All of our great expectations have been fulfilled! For born unto us this day is a Savior who is Christ the Lord. Glory to God in the highest, and on earth. peace to those upon whom His favor rests!

I wish you all a Merry Christmas! Amen.

### **Isaiah 11:1-6 The Righteous Reign of the Branch**

11 There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse,  
and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit.

<sup>2</sup> And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him,  
the Spirit of wisdom and understanding,  
the Spirit of counsel and might,  
the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.

<sup>3</sup> And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD.

He shall not judge by what his eyes see,  
or decide disputes by what his ears hear,  
<sup>4</sup> but with righteousness he shall judge the poor,  
and decide with equity for the meek of the earth;  
and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth,  
and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked.

<sup>5</sup> Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist,  
and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

<sup>6</sup>The wolf shall dwell with the lamb,  
and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat,  
and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together;  
and a little child shall lead them.

### **Galatians 3:26-4:7**

<sup>26</sup>for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. <sup>27</sup>For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. <sup>28</sup>There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup>And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

### **Sons and Heirs**

<sup>4</sup>I mean that the heir, as long as he is a child, is no different from a slave, though he is the owner of everything, <sup>2</sup>but he is under guardians and managers until the date set by his father. <sup>3</sup>In the same way we also, when we were children, were enslaved to the elementary principles of the world. <sup>4</sup>But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, <sup>5</sup>to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. <sup>6</sup>And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, "Abba! Father!" <sup>7</sup>So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.

### **John 1:1-14 The Word Became Flesh**

<sup>1</sup>In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. <sup>2</sup>He was in the beginning with God. <sup>3</sup>All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. <sup>4</sup>In him was life, and the life was the light of men. <sup>5</sup>The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.

<sup>6</sup>There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. <sup>7</sup>He came as a witness, to bear witness about the light, that all might believe through him. <sup>8</sup>He was not the light, but came to bear witness about the light.

<sup>9</sup>The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. <sup>10</sup>He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. <sup>11</sup>He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. <sup>12</sup>But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, <sup>13</sup>who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.

<sup>14</sup>And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.