

# GREAT EXPECTATIONS

ACTS 3.1-11 JANUARY 18, 2015

Good morning church. It is a pleasure and a privilege to be with you.

Charles Dickens' novel *Great Expectations* is a classic. It has been made into over a dozen movies and TV specials since 1917 and staged countless times in the theater. As is the case with many Dickens' stories, the book centers around a character who begins as an outcast, in danger and insecurity. In this novel that character is an orphan named Pip, who we see grow from boy to man.

*Great Expectations* was originally published in a weekly magazine in 35 parts. Times have changed! If I'm reading an article online and it has a 'page 2', 98% of the time I just think, 'Nope.' and close the page. What you may not know is that Dickens originally wanted the novel to be *twice* as long, but the publishers constrained him.

What are your expectations today? We all have them. We may find ourselves coming from different walks of life or facing different types of situations, but all of us have expectations.

Turn with me, if you will, over to Acts chapter 3. Today we're going to see the story of a man whose life was saved and transformed in a way that he absolutely wasn't expecting and, having been transformed, he rushed forward to the arms of God and for the first time ever had a future and a hope and a purpose and a community and a chance to count for something.

Whether you're a Christian here today or not, this story has a lot to say. And God has a lot to show us through this crippled man, if we're willing to put ourselves in his place and understand what God has done and what He's offering to us.

So let's take a look at our text and see what we see.

**Acts 3.1-11 - Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth *hour*. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple; who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms. And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, "Look at us." So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. Then Peter said, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." And he took him by the right hand and lifted *him* up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God. Then they knew that it was he who sat begging alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. Now as the lame man who was healed held on to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch which is called Solomon's, greatly amazed.**

Here's a fun hypothetical for you: If you were going to go on a shopping spree, what store would you choose? I'm sure there would be a lot of different answers represented in our group this morning. It's fun to daydream about our favorite retailer giving us 10 minutes to grab whatever we could, but it also uncovers some of the desires in our heart.

A major feature of our text is how this unnamed crippled man expected to receive something much different than Peter and John actually gave him. But what he got was so *much* better than what he was hoping for.

Let's put ourselves in his place and take a look within at what we're hoping or expecting to receive from God and then, knowing what God has given us, evaluate what we're doing with it.

The first look we want to take within our hearts is to find the answer to this question: What are you expecting to get from God? Or, what are you hoping for?

Take a look again at verse 1.

**Acts 3.1-2 - Now Peter and John went up together to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms from those who entered the temple;**

There's not a lot of detail given to us about this crippled man, but we do learn in chapter 4 that he was over 40 years old. He had been born crippled, unable to stand or walk, therefore unable to work or support himself or really have any kind of future *other* than begging on the street day after day.

Now, we don't know how long this place outside the temple gate called Beautiful had been his spot, but it had been a while. It was long enough that the multitude of people in the Temple that day recognized him and knew who he was. Contrast that with the blind man healed in John chapter 9, where people said, "it's not the same guy, it just *looks* like him."

No, they knew this crippled man because they saw him day after day, there in the same spot outside the temple courts, where his friends delivered him to beg for enough money to buy food and water to survive. That's all he could do. There were no programs for him. There was no community action center. He had no future and so he lived in this perpetual state of anguish and hopelessness.

Most of you already know this, but in case you don't let me tell you: *This man represents us!* Our physical circumstances may be better, we may have a couple of feet to stand on, but *spiritually* speaking, from our mother's womb we are just like him. Hopeless. No ability to save ourselves, with nothing to look forward to except death *apart* from the intervention of God.

Maybe you're here today and you're not a Christian. And maybe you're thinking, "No, that's not me. I can make my own way. I don't need anything from anyone on heaven or earth."

Maybe you *do* have it better, physically speaking, than this guy. Maybe you've got health and money and talent and a 5 year plan. But if we really take a look at this guy it will reveal something you *don't* have, and that's **access**.

You see, he was laid each day at the temple gate because he was not allowed to enter the Temple courts. He couldn't go offer worship or bring a sacrifice for his sin. He could *look* in but not *go* in.

The fact of the matter is that if you're not a Christian, you do not have access through the gates of heaven. Heaven isn't locked, but you can't get there yourself. Have you ever thought about that?

How are you going to *get* to heaven? Maybe you think, “I’m a good person. I’m not a terrorist, I don’t cyber-bully...maybe I cyber-bully a *little*...”

The Bible says that there is none righteous, no not one, that the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is everlasting life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

If you’re not a Christian, you’re more like this crippled man than you think. You are spiritually dead and need eternal life. But your friends can’t give it to you, all they can do is get you as far as they have today. And today, you are outside the gates of heaven and apart from Jesus you may not enter in because you are unqualified and unworthy, just like the rest of us were.

We all need God to intervene and offer us the gift of salvation and the gift of God to satisfy what we really need and bring rivers of living water out of our hearts. We all need God to intervene. Luckily, He’s in the intervention business.

**Acts 3.3-6 - who, seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, asked for alms. And fixing his eyes on him, with John, Peter said, “Look at us.” So he gave them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. Then Peter said, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.”**

That question again: What are you expecting? What are you hoping for? In the quiet of your heart, Christian and non-Christian alike, what are you asking for?

We all have some similar needs and we all have some different needs. And many of those needs are real and God cares about them. But there is a difference between a need and our *greatest* need.

We look at this guy and acknowledge that, yes, at that moment, he *needed* a few coins to buy some food to keep himself alive. But we know he really needed *more* than that. The cripple’s greatest need wasn’t money or a better physical situation. It was to have a relationship with the living God.

I know that because of what Peter and John said. Don’t miss this: They said, “*Yeah, we don’t have any money either!*”

If a better set of physical circumstances was the chief need in our lives, we would wonder why the Apostles walked around penniless! I find this very interesting. On the *financial* level, Peter and John really weren’t much better off than the crippled man! But instead of begging or going out fishing, which is what they knew how to do, where they had all the business connections, instead of that they were going to *prayer*. They understood that what they (and we) *really* need was closeness and intimacy with God. Contrary to the teachings of the Health and Wealth movement. Contrary to the cultural ideas we’re pounded with day after day. These guys understood that their greatest need was to commune with God and to dedicate themselves to Him. They went to the temple to pray, even though it would be among the same group that crucified Jesus Christ just a few months earlier. Despite the danger, despite their poverty, it was *Jesus* they were after. Not just philosophically, but in the actions and attitudes of their lives, it was Jesus they were after.

You see, they had learned the lesson of the stormy sea. Most of us are familiar with the stories of the 12 Disciples in storms on the sea. In both cases, they were screaming and shouting for the physical need, “Lord, SAVE us! Don’t you care that we are perishing!” But on *this* side of the cross they had

learned that what matters is the spiritual: The Kingdom of God, communing with God and abiding in His presence.

You've come into the Lord's house today. What are you here for? Are we hoping for something spiritual or for something physical?

It can be so hard for us to look above the physical level and turn our expectation heavenward, but it's something we *have* to do. We're *commanded* to do it!

**Colossians 3.2-3 - Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.**

One of the greatest things about the book of Acts is to see the mental perspective the Believers had. These Christians did *not* have it easy. But they were able to set their minds on heaven and rest their hope not on nickels and dimes, but on the power of God and His will for their lives.

Most of us, myself included, we get distracted pretty easily by the physical. If you apply a little stress to my life, I'm sad to say that most often my thoughts go immediately into the trouble of the trenches rather than the triumphs of heaven. That's why God tells us to 'let the mind of Christ be in you!'

Since we know the rest of the story, we know that the crippled man asked them for the wrong thing. He had very small expectations. And if we're consumed with the physical stresses and desires of life, we're not going to make progress in our walk with the Lord.

King Hezekiah is a profound example of this principle. He got sick, the Lord spoke to him and said, "Hezekiah, get your stuff in order because you're going to die." Hezekiah couldn't deal with that. Rather than setting his affection on the next life, he had totally wrapped up his heart on this one. And so he cries and pouts and begs God to extend his life.

In this case, God said, "If that's what you want, ok. You get 15 more years." But you know what happened in those additional 15 years? He had a son who would become king after him and was one of the most wicked kings in all Judah's history. And he showed a Babylonian envoy all the treasures of the palace and the temple, which lead to Babylon saying, "We'd like to have those treasures ourselves!"

When we're carnally minded, not only will we miss out on glory, but the collateral damage may be catastrophic.

God *does* care about your physical needs. He heals the sick. He provides for the needy. It's even in the Lord's prayer: "Give us this day our daily bread."

It's not that our physical needs are unimportant, but they are certainly not the *most* important.

If you are in the place of the cripple and Peter and John are in the place of Christ our King who has come to give us Himself, what do you expect to receive?

In Matthew 20 Jesus said to 2 blind men: "What do you want Me to do for you?"

Remember when God spoke to Solomon in a dream He said, "What do you want? Ask Me!"

That doesn't mean God is a vending machine or a genie in a bottle, but that question should speak to us. Maybe God isn't going to appear to you in a dream and ask you that question directly, but the Bible declares that God has set His eyes on You and that He desires to be not just a *part* of your life, but the *center* and *sustainer* of it. He wants to connect with us on the deepest level and work from there. He's offering us something today and we want our expectations to be as great as His offer.

And what we need is real transformation and conformation and intervention so that we don't live life like this crippled man was: Nickel and diming his way through life, not seeing above himself.

I think the most mind-blowing aspect of this story is the fact that this man almost assuredly had *seen* Jesus entering and exiting the Temple, he had undoubtedly heard the stories of how He healed the lame and the blind and the deaf, maybe even *witnessing* it himself from his vantage point at the temple gate, yet never once did he call out to Christ for help.

I know that because Jesus *never* refused anyone who called out for help. He never turned anyone away. He never said, "I'm all tapped out!"

Even apart from the miracles of Jesus, this man was a Jew and he knew the stories of how God's prophets had raised the dead and how God had parted the seas and stopped the sun in the sky.

But all this time there was something that kept him from calling out to God and asking for what he really needed. Instead, he was content to ask for alms and stay in the same place.

If you're not a Christian here today, the biggest need you have is not more money or better health, the biggest problem in your life is sin. That sin disqualifies you from heaven, but God does not want you to stay outside the gates, He wants to grant you access and transform your life, but you have to call out to Him. And if you let Him pass you by, then He will pass.

Maybe you think, "I'll have another chance. I'll convert on my death bed." Will you? 105 people die every single minute. More than 150,000 every single day. Can you guarantee that you're not going to be one of them? One of the truths this story is explaining to us is that our friends cannot get us into heaven. But God can, and He wants to if you will call out to Him, "All who call on the name of the Lord will be saved."

As Christians we *know* God has power. We know He has given us new life and a future hope and a calling and spiritual gifts. So the second question to pose to ourselves in verses 7 through 11 is: What are we going to do with what God gives?

**Acts 3.7 - And he took him by the right hand and lifted *him* up, and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.**

In the New Testament we see that healings like this we accompanied by faith and obedience. By God's grace, though this man had failed to call out to Jesus before, this time he believed and took Peter's hand and was made whole.

Peter didn't just suggest that he stand up, he *commanded* him! And the crippled man believed, obeyed and stood in strength. It says *immediately* his feet and ankle bones were made new.

Each of us should think about where we might find ourselves in that chain today. That progression of **belief, obedience** and then **standing strong**.

If you're not a Christian, you need to *believe*. The Bible says, "For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved."

If you're a Believer, are you *obeying*? God commands us to receive His gifts. The gift of salvation. The gift of His Son. The gift of the Spirit. Have you received what the Lord is offering? Along with the Lord's offer of forgiveness and transformation is a way of life and a way of thinking and service in the Kingdom. Jesus said, "If you love Me, obey My commandments."

Sometimes we convince ourselves that the commandments in God's word are too difficult to really keep. But look at the example of this blind man: The command he received was to get up and walk! Something that was impossible, right? But it wasn't impossible, because God provided the power. When God asks us to do something, or to *not* do something, He pairs the command with the power to accomplish it. Christians: Whatever God has told us to do, we *can* do if we are willing to obey and if we are willing to turn our gaze away from the pettiness of earth to the power of heaven.

And then third, are we *standing in strength*? God doesn't intend for His people to be weaklings. Right now it's popular to be the kind of Christians that are frequently venting our complaints or frustration or focusing on how *broken* we all are, all in the name of 'authenticity.' But is that Biblical? God didn't raise up this crippled man to crawl on his belly or to stumble around, but He set him on his feet in *strength*. Peter said in his epistle that the God of all grace, who calls us to His eternal glory in Christ will make us strong, firm and steadfast, even in suffering. Paul said to the Ephesians: "let the Lord make you strong. Depend on his mighty power."

If you're hard pressed or discouraged today, if you *feel* broken, we understand, but God doesn't want to leave you that way. His desire is to fill you with joy unspeakable. Peace. Stability. Contentment. The kind we see the Christians in the Book of Acts demonstrating page after page. And so, if you feel broken, go to the Lord, who is the Giver of strength.

**Acts 3.8-10 - So he, leaping up, stood and walked and entered the temple with them—walking, leaping, and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God. Then they knew that it was he who sat begging alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.**

This is the picture of what God wants to do for our spiritual lives, and that's to completely transform us into something wonderful and marvelous and full of vitality. And since this is an example of what God wants to do in our hearts, in certain ways our lives should mimic him.

First of all, we see that the fundamental activities of his life were changed. He went immediately from taking to giving praise, from begging to blessing the Lord. He *still* didn't have any money or a job or a full stomach, but he was fundamentally changed, not just in feet and ankles but in heart and mind.

Second, we see that he went from being motionless to walking and leaping. The Lord wants us to be on the move. He calls us to different tasks and areas of service in His Kingdom and we can be about that business right now. We don't want to be motionless in our spiritual lives, we want to be kicking up dust as we walk and leap around! And not kicking up dust in anger, but because we've thrown our lives and our energies into the will and worship of God.

Third, notice what he did: After 40 years of immobility, the first steps he took were to draw near to God, walking into the house of the Lord to worship.

We all desire that God draw near to us and be active in our lives. *He wants that too!* And He promises that if we will draw near to God, He will draw near to us.

**Acts 3.11 - Now as the lame man who was healed held on to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the porch which is called Solomon's, greatly amazed.**

Notice there how he *clung* to Peter and John. It *is* possible for any of us to experience a great interaction with Jesus, maybe even something life changing, and then to let that intimacy slip away. The Lord says we can leave our first love.

Peter experienced this in his own life. Having walked and lived with Jesus for 3 years, one of the inner circle, but on the night before the crucifixion he fell away, denying that he even *knew* the Lord. But then after the resurrection, Jesus restored what had been detached. For anyone who has drifted or fallen from closeness with God, don't stay away any more. Be restored. Cling to Jesus and to His word. Cling to His will for your life and be restored again.

This crippled man is an incredible example for us. He hadn't started with great expectations, but his encounter with God profoundly transformed him. Not just his feet that needed healing, but in his core he became a different person, a person dedicated to the Lord. So much so that when Peter and John were arrested that day for preaching the Gospel, he willingly waited all day and night so that he could stand *with them* at their trial before the Sanhedrin in chapter 4, because, rather than go home or flee to safety or go find his career, he devoted himself to the Lord. If he could walk, he was going to walk to the house of the Lord! If he could stand, he was going to stand with the servants of the Lord! He was going to *do something* with what he had been given. He didn't want to squander his new life, he wanted to set it in the hands of Jesus who clearly had the power and the love to do exceedingly above what he'd expect or imagine.

What an amazing picture this passage is for us! It shows the love God has for us, though we have nothing to offer apart from Him. But He loves us and desires to transform us down to the deepest core and do remarkable things in our lives. And we're able to see what a proper response to God is and how we can depend on Him and cling to Him.

Maybe you think, "Not me. God seems to have passed me by." Well, He's waiting before you right now. I love how it says there in verse 7 that Peter took him 'by the right hand'. A couple weeks ago on Wednesday night we heard a beautiful study on Psalm 73. Here's one verse from that song:

**Psalm 73.23 - Nevertheless I *am* continually with You; You hold *me* by my right hand.**

All of us should spend some time this week looking up the phrase, "my right hand" in the Bible, especially the Psalms, to see the kind of tender love God has for His people.

We're going to be having a baby in a couple of weeks here and one of the things we always look forward to with a tiny baby is how, even though they can't talk or hold their heads up or really do much of anything, those little fingers can grab onto your hand when you offer it to them.

Today, the Lord has come into our midst and He's offering to take our hands. He shown that He's willing to hold our heads up and cradle us close and lift us to our feet and be the God He's promised to be, if we will take His hand in faith and obedience.

Non-Christians, receive Jesus Christ. Turn from your sin and be saved. He has the power to raise you from death to life and bring restoration to whats weak and broken in your heart.

Christians, if you've slipped away from closeness with God, you've lost that spiritual mindset, return to the Lord and let Him restore your relationship. Allow Him to take you by the hand and invigorate your life in the ways that matter.

And for you Christians who *do* believe and *are* obeying and are standing strong, continue! Keep walking and leaping and praising God. Cling to Jesus and don't let Him go. Keep expecting God to do great and mighty things in and through your life.

Our God has great intentions for us. Let's have great expectations for what He will accomplish as we cling to Him.