

Living Expectantly

Deut. 14:22-29; Luke 12:35-48; 1st John 3:7-16



Labor Day is barely past, but stores have been anticipating Halloween for weeks. We are likely to see Christmas displays before the end of October. The holidays seem to arrive earlier each year as retailers live in expectation of holiday sales and extra spending. Do our lives display this same expectancy in serving Christ Jesus? What if we thought Jesus were returning this year?

Tithes were to meet the needs of the Levites, poor, orphans, and widows. God's bounty would not be distributed evenly. The people were responsible to see the needs of all met. God could have blessed each individual equally, but decided on a better way. Responsibility for one's fellow was part of God's plan for a wholesome, God-centered society. Though a communal approach to life has sometimes seemed the best way to meet the needs of all, such was not the plan established for Israel. God wanted each individual responsible for meeting the needs of others and relying on God's provision.

This was the ideal for the nation to achieve, though reality often fell short. It was easy to neglect one's tithe. It was easy to be carried away by one's own needs and fail to see the needs of others. It was a simple thing to look to one's own family and ignore those beyond direct family ties. After all, they lived within the bounds of their expectations. The people did not give much thought to God's immediate presence in their lives, nor did they concern themselves overly much with any sense that God would enforce the laws of tithing, special offerings, and the release of slaves and captives. They lived in accord with their expectations in life. They fended for themselves first, front, and center.

Back in Eighth Grade, faith was a simple, comfortable existence. I had accepted Christ Jesus years earlier, been baptized, and gone to church all my life. During Eighth Grade, however, I recognized that faith was about more than coasting along through life claiming God at my side. Other than the external habits of going to church, reading the Bible, and praying, there was nothing much that made me different from other folks of similar morality. I realized that faith was not making any real difference in my life, because I was not living as though it made a difference.

My family was on the mission field, but that was due to my parents'. I went to a Christian school, but going to a garage doesn't make you a car. I recognized that it was up to me to allow my faith to make a difference in my life. God wasn't going to turn my life around until I took the initiative to allow God to mold me according to God's will. Would I allow God to so invade my life that every aspect of my life would express God's presence?

"Those who do not love do not have eternal life abiding within them." These are strong words. John is rather categorical in his wording. This is no namby-pamby issue to hem and haw about. For John, eternal life equates itself with love. There are no exceptions. What does this love look like? John uses the Greek term for sacrificial love—agape. This is not a warm feeling about another. It is not an attitude of kindness. It is not simply a smile and a word of comfort to those in pain or need. Love requires more than surface expressions, making sacrifices in order to meet the needs of another.

John uses the example of sacrificing material wealth on behalf of another, but love is not only about the material things. It is also about time, energy, and the rest of our resources. In today's society, our time is more valuable than our money. Money is often the easy way to solve problems. We throw

money around as a solution to all manner of problems. It is in our time and personalized effort, however, that love finds meaningful expression.

Deoclécio was one of my students in Brazil. He invited me over to his home for a cookout and a Q&A session after class one night. I arrived after class at 11pm and we began discussing theology and grilling meat in gaucho fashion. At 3am he explained to me why this discussion was so important to him. Before accepting Christ, he used to stay up until 6am gambling. When he would awake, his first question was whether he had won or lost. Now that he had accepted Christ, he wanted to put God in the very center of his life, giving faith the importance he had once given to other pursuits. He wanted his life to show God's presence and love in a convincing manner.

Jesus related faithfulness to consistency. We should always be ready to serve. In fact we are not called only to be ready, but to be found actively serving. Living expectantly requires prior action in anticipation of our looking forward. Like the planning for a trip or building a house requires more than looking for the day of its arrival, so anticipating being called good and faithful servants requires action as we anticipate what is to come.

We don't know when Christ may come for us, but we are to live in constant readiness through faithful service. When the time comes, the faithful have nothing to fear. Our reward becomes that for which we have lived.

Salvation is by God's grace through faith. It is not something that we earn by our efforts. At the same time, we are saved for a life of faithfulness in this world which is to extend itself into eternity. As we come to faith in Christ Jesus, we are not called to sit back on all Christ has done, as though believers have little to no responsibility. Rather, we were called into faithfulness. We were saved in order to put evidence of the reality of our faith in action.

Faithfulness requires being ready by living our lives in faithful service. Heaven, after all, is not a front porch swing or a rocking chair. Heaven is about living and serving in God's presence for all of eternity. So much more than a "Get out of hell free card," salvation is about being rescued and enabled to serve God and others. This is the life that Christ Jesus lived as an example for us. We are called to live with Him and live like Him as well.

Faith is the conviction of things unseen. It is living in expectation of what we know is to come. It is like making preparations for Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas. Because we know they are coming, we begin to make our preparations. We make plans, but we also act on those plans. We know there is much more to holiday festivities than simply going along for the ride. They require action and investment of time and energy on our part.

Why would we live our faith any differently? Why would we think that going along for the ride is all we need to do? Salvation is about allowing Christ Jesus turn our lives around. It is about living in the full expectation of seeing our Lord and Savior one day. Are we living expectantly for that day's arrival at any moment? Are we ready to allow God to change our lives forever? Salvation is not only about eternity far off in heaven. The gospel is about living in God's presence from now on to forever. We are already in God's presence. Are we living that reality?

—*Christopher B. Harbin*