

THE POWER OF HIGH EXPECTATIONS

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on March 13, 1966 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

It was some years after the death of Christ before Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John wrote their accounts of the life of the Lord. The dating of the various books has been a matter of much discussion and debate. Henry Theissen, in his *Introduction to the New Testament*, after marshalling a great deal of evidence, concludes that Matthew wrote about A.D. 50, Luke about A.D. 58, Mark about A.D. 67-68, and John as late as A.D. 85-90. While we cannot know that these dates are absolutely accurate, they are as solid as any that we know. Actually, we are not greatly concerned in this particular study with dates. Our primary purpose in suggesting these dates is to point out that it is generally agreed that the apostle John wrote last of all and that he wrote almost half a century after the time that he saw his Lord ascend into heaven. We also remember that he was the intimate friend of the Lord, known as the "beloved disciple." In his gospel he affords us certain insights not mentioned by the other writers. Our text today is one of those passages which is not to be found in any of the other gospel narratives.

Text: John 1:35-51

The apostle John begins this particular paragraph by referring to John the Baptist, as he says, "Again on the morrow John was standing, and two of his disciples; and he looked upon Jesus as he walked, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God! And the two disciples heard him speak, and they followed Jesus." Here it is appropriate to comment that the two disciples were likely Andrew and John, for in the sentences that follow Andrew is specifically designated, and the fact that the other disciple is not mentioned by name fits with the apostle John's repeated practice of not naming himself when he is involved in the story.

Our text continues, "And Jesus turned, and beheld them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? and they said unto him, Rabbi (which is to say, being interpreted, Teacher), where abidest thou?" Notice two things here. First, the word, Rabbi, which means teacher, was often used by these disciples at the beginning of their relationship with Christ, but gradually this word was replaced by the word, Lord. As they grew to know Jesus more fully they called him more than teacher; they called him Lord. In the second place, notice that John often includes a parenthetical expression in which he interprets an Aramaic word for his Gentile readers, as in this case he translates Rabbi by saying that it means teacher.

We continue our reading: "He saith unto them, Come, and ye shall see. They came therefore and saw where he abode; and they abode with him that day: it was about the tenth hour." This time designation refers either to ten o'clock in the morning or four o'clock in the afternoon, depending upon whether one follows the Jewish system of reckoning time or the Roman system. There is evidence that by the time the apostle John wrote, he had transferred from the Jewish system which reckons the day from sundown to sundown, to the Roman system which reckons the day from midnight to midnight. Evidence suggesting that John follows the Roman system is to be found in John 20:1, 19 in his reference to the resurrection day, and by a comparison of Mark 15:25 with John 19:14 where the time of the crucifixion is discussed.

Our text continues, "One of the two that heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He findeth first his own brother, Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah (which is being interpreted Christ). He brought him unto Jesus. Jesus looked upon him, and said, Thou art Simon the son of John: thou shalt be called Cephas (which is by interpretation Peter)." Here a very significant point is emphasized. Andrew was so thrilled by his discovery of the Christ that he immediately wanted to introduce his brother Simon to the Lord. There is a great, practical lesson for all of us in this example. Real Christians immediately want to share their new-found blessings in Christ with others. When one does not feel an urgent desire to tell others about Christ, there is a rather strong implication, either that he has not fully comprehended what Christ means to him, or that he does not have a very great love for his fellowmen. In a sense, one can evaluate his own Christianity by analyzing his own eagerness to share the Lord with the yet unsaved.

At this point our text begins a new paragraph with the words, "On the morrow he was minded to go forth into Galilee, and he findeth Philip: and Jesus saith unto him, Follow me." There is no special significance attached to the fact, but the word Philip means "lover of horses." "Now Philip was from Bethsaida, of the city of Andrew and Peter." This city was located on the northeast shore of the Sea of Galilee and its name carried the meaning "house of fishing." "Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him of whom Moses and the law, and the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph." We see in Philip exactly the same thing that we saw in the previous paragraph in Andrew. Both these men are eager to share the blessings that they have just discovered in Christ with those whom they love. However, Nathanael was hard to convince. Incidentally, this Nathanael is the same person referred to in Matthew's list of the apostles as Bartholomew. The word is a patronymic word, Bar-Tholmai, or son of Tholmai. Actually, it is Nathanael, son of Tholmai-Nathanael Bartholomew.

"And Nathanael said unto him, Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" He was either saying I have read the Old Testament prophecies, and I find no mention that the Messiah is to come from Nazareth, or he was saying that the city of Nazareth was a rather

undesirable, dirty little village. "Philip saith unto him, Come and see." This is a particularly good answer, and is symbolic of the fact that Christ always was eager for careful examination. Christianity, likewise, always invites people to take a close look and to examine it carefully. Neither Christ nor Christianity needs to be bolstered by words or a false front. Both eagerly solicit careful, thorough examination at close range.

Our text continues, "Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile! Nathanael saith unto him, Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said unto him, Before Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee. Nathanael answered him, Rabbi, Thou art the Son of God; thou art King of Israel. Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these. And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye shall see the heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."

What High Expectation Can Do For a Life

In addition to the rich meanings already seen in this great text, there is another. It is simply the wonderful stimulating, uplifting power that high expectations can exert upon a life. Notice again John 1:42. When Andrew brought his brother Simon to Jesus Simon possessed in his nature the qualities of instability and change which are seen in the Biblical narration of his behavior from time to time. He was fickle and changeable, and has been compared to the Sea of Galilee, which could be placid one moment and violently turbulent the next. When he first met Jesus the narrative says, "Jesus looked upon him, and said, Thou art Simon the son of John: thou shalt be called Cephas, (which is by interpretation Peter)." In other words, Jesus gave this volatile young man a new name, rock or stone, which was to serve as a goal and directing force in his life. Through the Biblical account of the life of Peter we see him as he gradually grows from the unstable young man into the rock which we find as we read in the early chapters of Acts and, in his own writing of I Peter. Christ's high expectations helped this young man to grow into the solidity of character that ultimately characterized his life.

In the second paragraph of our text we find a second example. In John 1:47-49 we read of the great compliment that Christ paid to Nathanael, "Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" The word translated guile in the English comes from the Greek word "dolos" which means bait for fish, snare, or deceit." As Nathanael realized that it was the Lord who had paid him this great compliment, it is not unreasonable to believe that it had a great warming, encouraging effect upon his heart and life. So high a tribute to a young Jewish man would undoubtedly lead him to want to become even finer.

Through the years I have come to feel that the high expectation of some loved one or friend is one of the most powerful influences that can come into one's life for good. In looking back to my own childhood I can remember the effect that the high estimation of my mother had upon me. For example, there were no girls in our family, so from time to time it was necessary for me to wash the dishes. Even though it has been more than forty years since she said the words, I can still remember that my mother on one occasion told a friend, "Batsell Barrett can clean the kitchen as well as I can." Her high estimate of my abilities along this line certainly helped to make it so.

I can also remember another time when she said, "Batsell Barrett is the best yard man I ever had." The effect upon a young boy of such confidence on the part of his mother was enormous. My mowing of the grass, trimming around the sidewalks and the trees, and my cleaning out under the hedge was far better done than had I not known of her faith. On still other occasions I can still remember that she would say, "You make this decision yourself. I have confidence that you will make the right decision. It is difficult to make a decision different from the one that your parents wish, when they express such confidence in you,

Several weeks ago I had occasion to share the responsibilities of conducting a funeral with a man who is probably Nashville's most widely known preacher. We had a number of minutes in which to share ideas as we rode to and from the cemetery. I mentioned to him some of the things that I have just presented and was impressed with his response. He told of how he had been one of seven boys. He felt that his mother gave him an unusually hard time and that she loved him less than several of his brothers. This understandably had had quite a negative effect upon him and his relationship with his mother. One afternoon, he was just rousing from a nap on the divan in the living room, when he heard his mother and a neighbor in conversation on the front porch. The neighbor asked, "Mrs.____, which one of your boys would you choose, if you had to be dependent upon one of them?" Without hesitation his mother said his name. He could hardly believe it. He was the son that she would choose to depend upon.

Later, he asked her about it and she said, "Yes, it is true." He then asked why she gave him so difficult a time and was so hard upon him. She explained that it was because she had to be. He had an unusually strong will and demanded more discipline and the like. The effect of this conversation was such that it changed his whole life. It changed his attitude toward his mother and toward the family. He discovered, you see, that his mother had a very high regard for him. that his mother really loved him.

I believe it is possible to see this same effect in other examples in the scriptures. In the opening paragraph of Luke 5, we read of Jesus preaching a sermon to a multitude on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Later, he asked Peter to put out into the deep and let down the nets for a draught of fishes. The catch was so heavy that Peter and the others were frightened. At that point Jesus said, "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men." (Luke 5:10). Jesus lifted Peter's sights from fishing for fish to fishing for the souls of men. Undoubtedly this had a part in directing Peter's life upward toward greatness.

Across the page in my Bible are the words, "And after these things he went forth, and beheld a publican named Levi, sitting at the place of toll, and said unto him, Follow me. And he forsook all, and rose up and followed him." (Luke 5:27-28). In other words, Jesus came by and from all of the many people that were busily passing to and fro he singled out Matthew Levi and called him to be his disciple. For a moment, think of what it means to be invited, to be singled out for special invitation, to be wanted. The effect was so great that Levi left his work and immediately followed Jesus. Christ had chosen him, and this so penetrated Levi that he was willing to leave behind the lucrative employment of tax-collector and let the Lord direct his life.

In Luke 6:12-16 we read of the occasion when Jesus chose his twelve apostles. After spending an entire night in prayer the text says, "And when it was day, he called his disciples; and he chose from them twelve whom also he named apostles." Think of what it must have meant to these men to be signally honored by being the inner circle of apostles. The rest of the story is that they yielded their lives to the Lord and moved upward toward greatness. Their Lord's high expectation of them certainly was a significant factor.

Conclusion

It is interesting to study the factors that cause some men to rise to the very limits of their abilities and to stand above the crowd. What motivates men to do their best? Of course, this is a complex question and no single factor includes all of the many facets of motivation. However, it is unquestionably true that one of the major factors is the power of high expectation. When someone whom we love and respect expresses faith and confidence it has a tremendously beneficial effect upon us. One of the strongest motivations is the high expectation of someone whom we respect and love.

By way of conclusion, let us remember that Christ expects much of each of us. God created us in his own image, a compliment of tremendous proportions. Then he gave us tremendous freedom to determine the density of our own souls. He has warmed us with his love, blessed us with countless blessings, guided us with his holy word, and then has trusted us to make the decision of how we will spend our lives. With this great confidence placed in us by the Creator of the universe, we have great responsibilities. We must not disappoint the Lord who loved us and placed such great trust in us.