

Series: Because of Christ

Date: 1.03.2021

Text: Hebrews 12.5-13 | **Title:** Expect Great Things, Attempt Great Things

Intro

I grew up playing soccer. My senior year of high school was a pinnacle soccer year. A handful of us were 4 year starters and now we were on a comeback tour from getting just waxed our first couple of years by bigger stronger teams. Those first two years, we expected to lose. There were bigger better players on the other teams and our seniors were more interested in harassing us underclassmen than they were learning how to play soccer. We went through the motions. We expected to lose, and we lost. I had come from a travel team that had a winning culture and going through a couple of years of a losing culture was AWFUL. I do not like losing.

So, coming into senior year we worked out all summer. Even went on a beach trip with a buddy and we ran sprints in the soft sand. We were committed. We had good team unity. And we went into the season **expecting** to win. Each pre-game we'd talk about how we put in the work, we had a plan, and we believed that we could win. We knew we could win. We were going to be SHOCKED if we lost. We even had a little swagger because we were high school boys. And we did win. Swept the conference. Won the championship. It was an epic comeback tour. And I learned first hand that I never wanted to be on a team that EXPECTED to lose ever again. That skepticism & bitterness that breeds...man it's toxic to a group of people.

I bring that up because the longer I've been a Christian the more I realize that we as a group can fall victim to that same skepticism when it comes to God's work in the world. We aren't a sports team so we don't call it a losing culture but that's what it is. We can develop a culture that goes through the motions...but the whole time we are silently sure that we are going to be disappointed.

If we pray...we don't *really* expect God to really change anything. We worship trying to hype ourselves into belief but when the music stops so does our faith. we read our bible, but we don't really *EXPECT* God who changed things in there to change us. We invite someone to church or we share the gospel with someone and we *EXPECT* to get shot down. Ya'll skepticism about God's work through us...that's a losing culture spiritually. And I believe perhaps the elephant in the room of most Christian homes & in most Christian journals is skepticism...doubt...that the God of the bible will actively work in and through them. And today we are going to talk about it.

This series of sermons we are in is called "because of Christ." It's a pretty unique time for us because we are laying out our vision for the next 5 years as a church. Which you might think is crazy during a pandemic but sometimes circumstantial upheaval strips away the unimportant and helps you see clearly. I believe that's been one of the blessings of the pandemic. Clearly seeing that which matters most. And so, week 1 we set out our 5 year **vision: Mercy is committed to becoming a maturing, multiplying, multiethnic church.** That's the church we will be and it's the kind of churches we will plant over and over by God's grace.

Last week we rolled out our first value which is simply: Because of Christ – **Mercy Value: We keep the gospel at the center of all we do.** We talked about how culturally timely that is, but also how personally critical that is. The gospel informs every square inch of our public and private lives. Every instruction in scripture flows from who we are in Christ. All of our practices are not efforts to earn God's approval but instead they are celebrations OF God's acceptance of us in Christ.

Today we introduce our second ministry value and it's about the culture of **faith** we want to embody here. To do that I'm going to show you one of my all time favorite scenes in scripture where a group of people show the kind of faith we long to embody here. Go to Luke 5. Going to start in verse 17 and work our way through a story of the faith of some friends.

17 On one of those days while he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there who had come from every village of Galilee and Judea, and also from Jerusalem. And the Lord's power to heal was in him.

- Lord's power to heal wasn't in the pharisees and teachers of the law. Who had come from all over because they heard this Jesus was doin some things. No, the Lord's power to heal was in WHO? Was in him.
- This is setting us up. And I want to go ahead and set you up. Everything else is today is going to be founded on whether or not you believe that. Hebrews 13.8 says Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. So if the power was in him then the power to heal is in

him. That's the Jesus we are talking about. That's the GOD we are talking about. That's the God we worship. The one with the power to heal. To heal bodies and to heal hearts and to heal relationships. He's the great healer. STILL. TODAY. RIGHT NOW.

18 Just then some men came, carrying on a stretcher a man who was paralyzed. They tried to bring him in and set him down before him.

Some men – that's all we ever get to know them as. Some men. Nameless guys trying to get another nameless guy to Jesus. And the unspoken motivation behind their action is that they expected that IF they could get this paralyzed man to Jesus...Jesus would heal him. They had heard about his ability to heal, some of them had maybe seen it. These weren't theologians or church leaders or anything. Just some men.

19 Since they could not find a way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on the stretcher through the roof tiles into the middle of the crowd before Jesus.

Ok so at this point if you were at Mercy in March of 2019 you might be thinking...have I heard this before? YES! I preached on this passage two years ago in a sermon I called "tear the roof off." And I realized this week that if we are going to talk in this series about our core values... We need to revisit the faith at work in these guys because I think God woke something up in us the first time I preached it. If I could I would package up the EXPECTANCY in the hearts of this group and I would give it to you in a protein powder form and you'd use your cool shaker

bottle each morning & drink in some expectancy and go out and exercise some faith. This metaphor is getting away from me.

I want to keep this real simple: There is no other explanation for these guys doing what they are doing other than the expectation that Jesus would heal this guy. I WANT THAT KIND OF FAITH. THAT is a winning culture spiritually.

This wasn't easy. They went through the normal means. Put this guy on a stretcher and walked him. And the normal means of access wasn't available. DID THAT STOP THEM? NO. A group of people who are just going through the motions...who don't expect Jesus to actually change anything...they will usually REFUSE to get creative with their ministry model when the time calls for it. This is a little aside but its huge. Skeptical bitter Christians are less concerned with getting to Jesus than they are with doing things the way they've always done it. But not these guys. These guys had a mission and so their obstacle was nothing more than an opportunity to be creative.

They invented a whole new ministry. Rooftop Evangelism. Worth it. And look how Jesus responds:

20 Seeing their faith he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

Seeing their faith. Soak that up. Seeing their faith. Because faith apart from works is dead. Seeing their faith which is expressed in their determination to get to him & their belief he has power to help, he says Friend...your sins are forgiven. Listen I want to talk to you right now who are praying daily for people to come to Christ...he sees your faith. Keep praying.

Now, some of you are like...wait doesn't the paralytic have to believe in order to be saved? YES. But we can assume this guy

wasn't being carried around & lowered down all against his will. He was literally on board with this. But yes you should see how powerful the faith of a friend is.

But the more important thing to see is that Jesus doesn't heal his body...which is what they were all after. That's a shock to everyone. Instead he says "your SINS are forgiven." Now why oh why would he say that!?

That's nice Jesus but I actually came for physical healing. And this is what happens to most people. Jesus, what I really need is for you to fix my husband. Jesus what I really need IS a husband. Jesus what I really need is relief from the pressure at work. Jesus what I really need is for you to fix my demon child. Jesus what I really need is some friends in my same life stage. Jesus what I really need is for you to take away my chronic pain.

LISTEN: Jesus MEETS YOU WHERE YOU ARE. He hears what you think you really need. He doesn't shrug that off!! He cares. He loves you. He counts the hairs on your head, he calls you his child and he wants you to feel the love he has towards you which is more intense and complete than any love on earth.

AND BECAUSE OF THAT LOVE...He says what you REALLY NEED – Is forgiveness from your sin. That is your GREATEST need.

21 Then the scribes and the Pharisees began to think to themselves: "Who is this man who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

Ok listen this scene is rich with meaning here. The scribes and pharisees were the ones crowding the house. They were the reason the guys had to go get up on the roof. They were in

close and they were there LOOKING for an opportunity to criticize.

These guys came ready to pounce. They were looking for an opening. Some flaw in his teaching. And notice the wording...they began to THINK to themselves. Nobody saying anything. Just sitting there being silent sermon critics. Notice the difference between the Pharisees & the roof-tearing friends? Roof-Tearers believed, Pharisees were skeptical. They were sermon critics. Roof-tearers were urgent, Pharisees were resistant. Roof-tearers took down obstacles to get to Jesus, Pharisees were obstacles keeping others from Jesus. Roof-tearers wanted others to benefit from the power of Jesus, Pharisees rejected his power & authority to benefit others. If you stop to think of it, not once in any of the gospels do you find a teacher or a Pharisee bringing anyone to Jesus for mercy and grace. You often find them opposing and resisting people who wish to draw near to Him. At best, you find the Pharisees and teachers passively tolerant. **Simple question: are you more of a roof-tearer or a sermon critic?** Are you sacrificing your life to get others to Jesus or do you sit and consume, and criticize when you hear something you don't like? And the answer depends entirely on who you believe Jesus is & what you believe he can do.

²² But perceiving their thoughts, Jesus replied to them, "Why are you thinking this in your hearts?"

If you don't know it...right now as I'm preaching...Jesus is perceiving your heart thoughts. Those thoughts down in the core of your soul about who he is. Man he knows us. So be real with him. Have you been going through the motions but actually cynical of him changing anything in your life? That's what we are here for today. To address it and to allow Jesus to change our hearts.

²³ Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? ²⁴ But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins"—he told the paralyzed man, "I tell you: Get up, take your stretcher, and go home." ²⁵ Immediately he got up before them, picked up what he had been lying on, and went home glorifying God. ²⁶ Then everyone was astounded, and they were giving glory to God. And they were filled with awe and said, "We have seen incredible things today." ¹

What a day that guy had! Sins forgiven AND legs restored. Pretty awesome. He can walk. And as a result, the rest of the crowd were astounded and gave glory to God. Now why is this such a critical word for our church? Here is the value we are centering on today. Here is the one thing I want you to leave with. What I believe we need to go to war against the unspoken cynicism plaguing churches.

Mercy Value
We expect God to change a life today

¹ [Christian Standard Bible](#). (2020). (Lk 5:17–26). Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

Because of Christ. Because of who he is and what we've already seen him do...we expect him to change a life today. Like the guys on the roof...we expect that if we bring people close to Jesus...Jesus will change them. We believe he has power.

We believe Romans 1.16 that the gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes. And listen here's the reality – you and I get to be the friends carrying the stretcher because we were once the one on the stretcher. We had no way to get to Jesus on our own but somebody brought us to Jesus. Somebody had a conversation with you. Somebody drove the van that took me to that student camp in middle school & somebody explained the gospel to me. People carried my stretcher because they believed if they could get me to Jesus, he could heal me. And God in his grace gave me the greater miracle. Physical healing is just a sign. I needed the greater miracle and he looked at me and said "Son, your sins are forgiven." And now I GET to look for ways to help others meet Jesus. Because I long for them to hear and believe those same words.

Tell you two things this means we need to give ourselves to individually and as a church. How we go from cynical powerless Christian routine to powerful faith.

1. **Expectant People Pray** – Prayer is God's divinely appointed means of releasing his power to work in the world. Samuel Chadwick: "The one concern of the devil is to keep the saints from prayer. He fears nothing from prayerless studies, prayerless work, prayerless religion. He laughs at our toil,

mocks at our wisdom, but trembles when we pray... Prayer turns ordinary mortals into men of power...It brings fire. It brings rain. It brings life. It brings God. There is no power like that of prevailing prayer." -Samuel Chadwick, *The Path of Prayer*

This is the command of God the father and it's the command of the son Jesus Christ. The people of God are to be a praying people. Matthew 6 – pray our father in heaven hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done. Give us this day our daily bread. That's daily prayer. Paul says 1 Thess 5.17 to pray without ceasing. Hebrews 4.16 – draw near to the throne of grace so that we can find help

There is an implicit AND explicit assumption in scripture that God's people pray. And through their prayers – the Lord does his work in the world. A prayerless church is a powerless church.

Now, I know the reason some of you don't pray is because in your cynicism you don't really believe your prayers affect any kind of change. You think to yourself...well, God knows the future right? And you quote Isaiah 46.10
10 I declare the end from the beginning, and from long ago what is not yet done,
saying: my plan will take place, and I will do all my will. --
Isaiah 46:10

And I'm impressed you know that reference. But I'm disappointed you use it as a weapon to disobey the very God

you are quoting. So what I told you last year in the Pray 20 series is that Yes God's plans are unchanging, but they are also still unfolding. And it's through the prayers of God's people that God fulfills his plans.

Remember Moses in Exodus 32? He prays for God to relent from the disaster he was about to bring on Israel. And God...the scripture says...SO GOD RELENATED. And we think...did God change his mind!? But then you say Numbers 23.19 God never changes his mind.

And I'm getting really impressed with your bible knowledge btw. So you think... So, you ask...What if Moses didn't pray? Then would God have destroyed Israel? AND THEN it wouldn't have been God's will to spare Israel after all? Or...would God have just gotten somebody else if Moses didn't do it?

And you translate that to your life and think...So when I pray it was God's will for me to pray? Or if I forget to, God will get somebody else to? Or maybe my not praying was instrumental in something NOT happening?

And then your brain says STOP IT MAN. THAT HURTS!

And the reason that frustrates us is because we are asking the wrong question about God and his plans. Maybe this will help. 19th century Princeton theologian named A.A. Hodge said this:

² Borrowed from J.D. Greear. He Adapted from Charles Ryrie, who stole it from A. A. Hodge, *Evangelical Theology* (1890), 92–93. *Nothing new under the sun*

“Does God know the day you’ll die? Yes. Has he appointed that day? Yes. Can you do anything to change that day? No. Then why do you eat? To live. What happens if you don’t eat? You die. Then if you don’t eat, and die, then would that be the day that God had appointed for you to die?”

(New slide) *...Quit asking stupid questions and just eat. Eating is the pre-ordained way God has appointed for living.”²* Prayer is the PRE-ORDAINED WAY God has appointed for carrying out his purposes in the world! SO PRAY!!!

Mercy, if we expect God to change a life today...and our prayers are the pre-ordained way he has set up to release his power in the world then we will be a people who Constantly cry out to God Expecting he is going to change things. That's a healthy culture. We know he will do it.

Listen right now I want to talk to you who are doubting God because you've been praying for someone for a year. Two years. Longer. Maybe a distant spouse or a grown child or lost friend you are just aching over and you are starting to wonder if prayer works. And the answer is yes. God hears you.

- He heard Abraham on the way to the altar when he said to Isaac 'the lord will provide a sacrifice', He heard Rachel ask him to open her womb, he heard Moses on the mountain when he called on God to relent, he heard Jonah in the whale when Jonah turned from his ways, he heard Gideon when he asked for confirmation before battle, he heard Samson between the pillars

crying out let me die with the philistines, he heard Elijah on Mt Carmel when he summoned fire from heaven, he heard Elisha when he asked God to reveal the angel army surrounding him, he heard David in the pasture, on the battlefield, and in the palace. he heard Daniel in the lions den. He heard Shadrach Meshach & Abednego as they defied Nebuchadnezzar and were tossed into the flames. He heard Naomi weep bitterly for all she'd lost and he heard Job do the same. He heard the prophets cry out on behalf of his people.

- He heard Mary magnify him, he heard Zechariah and Elizabeth praise him, he heard cries for healing, cries for sight, he heard the agony of Mary & Martha before he resurrected Lazarus, he heard the centurion's faith and healed his daughter, he heard Peter ask for help as he sank out on the water, he heard the Samaritan woman ask for the living water, he heard the criminal on the cross next to him ask for salvation and God the father in heaven heard the cry of his son saying father forgive them.
- He heard the prayers of the early church and shook their meeting place. He healed the sick through their prayers, cast out demons through their prayers, brought revival through their prayers, raised up missionaries through their prayers, brought the known world to knowledge of Christ through their prayers.
- ALL of this is why we BELIEVE 1 John 5.14 this is the **confidence** we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he HEARS us. **James 5.16**

that the prayer of a Righteous person has GREAT POWER as it is working.

WE expect the God who hears us is powerful. That he releases his power through our prayers JUST like he always has. SO let's UNLEASH his power in our homes, in our church, in our city, in our world.

Listen I want to ask us to make the Mercy Prayer team the most populated ministry team at Mercy Church. Seriously. You can pray anywhere right? COVID or not...you can pray. I got about 6 needs this week of people in our church suffering bigtime. YOU can pray God's power over them.

2. Expectant People Take Action

Because these guys believed Jesus could heal, they took action. They did whatever it took so to get this guy to Jesus. This is the culture of people who expect God to change a life today. Think about it for a second...the reason we work as hard as we do on our weekly worship services is because we 1) believe God is worthy of it and 2) we believe the gospel has the power to save. We want to preach it as clearly and with as much conviction as possible. The reason we have a parking team and greeting team is not to impress you...but to help take down some of those natural barriers we feel when coming to a new place SO that you can hear the gospel. Because we EXPECT God is going to change you today. Maybe he's going to save you. Maybe he's going to convict you of sin. But I expect when his word is preached, the spirit will work in you. That's why our pastors and I hang around up front after the service. So you can come process what God is doing RIGHT NOW.

I want us to believe from the moment someone gets in the parking lot or opens up their computer screen that GOD has WORK HE WANTS TO DO!

COMMUNION

This is why our student ministry leaders and college leaders and community group leaders train in how to make disciples. Because we believe that when we are together with God's word in these groups, when we are calling one another up in holiness...GOD IS GOING TO CHANGE US! He's going to make us more into the image of his son. He's going to give us victory over sin because he said he's broken the chains of that sin already. It was in a sermon I gave my life to Christ, it was across a table at QUIZNOS that God called me into ministry. QUIZNOS ya'll. That's not a mountaintop. But God used a mentor who believed God was working through him in my life. I've watched him speak through me and impact others. I've helped people receive salvation in Jesus, I've helped them identify their next steps of faith, I've helped them grieve with his power & celebrate with his power. Not because I'm special. I just decided a while back that Jesus took my cynicism up on that cross with the rest of my sin and shame. So I'm going to wake up EXPECTING GOD to change a life through me today. I'm reading his word each morning eager for the message he might have for me to give to someone.

IN SHORT: Ok Lord, HELP ME SEE who is on the stretcher today and what the best route is to get them to you. Famous missionary William Carey said Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God. This is our culture here. We EXPECT our God to change lives; so we pray desperately and we do whatever it takes for people to hear the gospel.