

Those of you who enjoy reading novels may have read a novel by Charles Dickens. Among his many novels was one titled, "Great Expectations," a novel about an orphan named Pip and his journey of personal growth during the 1800's. Looking at our text, it seems clear that God has some great expectations for us, expectations more challenging than those of Charles Dickens character, Pip. As we focus on this one verse from Micah and connect it to the Epistle and Gospel, we focus on our theme: "God's Great Expectations."

I. Without doubt, God has great expectations for each one of us. A. However, it's clear that we fail to live up to His expectations. 1. We fail because we are drawn in by the world's wisdom. In our Epistle, Paul asks, "Where is the one who is wise?" And we automatically think of someone we know, someone like us but only a bit wiser than we are. To our minds, the world's wisdom looks so inviting. "Follow our plan and you can lose 50 pounds in ten days. By doing XY and Z, you can attain for life goals in 30 days!" It sounds so wonderful, so inviting, so intriguing that we are pulled into the quicksand without realizing what we have done.

2. We fail to live up to His expectations because we are prone to boasting. Again Paul writes, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." But why does Paul write those words? Because we have a problem with boasting! If boasting were never an issue, God wouldn't waste precious time instructing us not to boast. Yet God knows we have a problem, that we are easily led to boast, to brag, to tell everyone what we have done. To the world, it may sound great and may even get us some recognition, but to our God, it's anything but music to His ears. It's more like a four year old pounding on the piano than a skilled musician playing music that could come from heaven.

3. We also fail because we fail to realize the power of the cross. To the world, the cross is pure foolishness; it's a waste of time and little more than the recorded words of a fool. We may not want to put ourselves into the category of a fool, but when we treat the cross as foolishness, as insignificant, as nothing, we number ourselves among the foolish. Left to logic, the cross makes no sense. However, some things in life are not intended to be judged by logic. In fact, most of the Christian faith is illogical, yet it provides the greatest news of hope available in this world. Whenever we diminish the cross, we diminish the expectations of our great God.

II. How, then, do we strive to live up to God's great expectations? A. We strive by practicing justice. 1. We practice justice by acknowledging the power of the cross. In our Epistle, Paul says that the word of the cross is the power of God. What's Paul saying? The message that the world calls foolishness, engulfs the entire power of God in a single event. In the cross, Jesus demonstrates His power to forgive our sins. You can't do that and neither can I, but the power of the cross contains the power of God and, therefore, it can and it does forgive. To do justice as Micah writes, is to do justice to the cross, to the power of God encapsulated in that cross.

2. We practice justice by preaching Christ crucified. "For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, the power of God." Why did the Creator allow you to arrive on this earth? To have a good time, to get rich,

or to share the power of God through the message of Christ crucified? Compared to what we see and hear, it sounds out of place. Yet all that other chasing leads us nowhere. God did not create you to go nowhere. Your mission, my mission is to share Christ, to show and tell His love, His care, His hope. That's our purpose in life.

B. We strive to live up to His expectations by choosing to love kindness. 1. We choose kindness by looking for the opportunity. Micah writes, "What does the Lord require of you but to do justice and to love kindness." What does it mean to love kindness? Loving kindness is turning our back on hatred, on revenge, on anger, on getting even. Our world is starving for kindness; it's malnutrition level is at an all time high. Around you, people are begging for an act of kindness. They may not know it or act like it, but each time you offer an act of kindness, it fills a tiny space in a gigantic void. Love kindness for as you do, it will change hearts and lives.

2. We choose kindness by emulating the example of Christ. As Christ walked the earth, was He an effective leader? Did He accomplish His mission and still maintain an unprecedented level of respect? And now, one more question, "Did He do it all while demonstrating kindness? No one else in history has accomplished what He accomplished and yet did it in a spirit of kindness. Today, that same Christ calls us to be effective yet kind, to lead with kindness, to face our challenges with kindness. Whatever we do, He calls us to do it within the backdrop of kindness. If He can do it, He will enable and empower us to do it as well.

C. We strive to live up to His expectations by walking humbly with our God. 1. We walk humbly by living up to His calling. Paul writes, "For consider your calling." Our calling is one of humility. Our world may teach us to brag, to boast, to tell the world all the wonderful things we have done in the hope of getting that pat on the back. Yet, God has not called you or me to get a pat on the back, but to walk humbly, to be people in motion within this boastful world, yet to accomplish our God-directed tasks with humility. When you need an example, find two intersecting lines and there you will see the perfect example of effective humility.

2. We walk humbly by giving God the glory. "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord," writes Paul. You can win the game, accomplish tasks no one before you has ever accomplished. You can make a name for yourself that enables you to stand above the crowd. You can be named to the world's hall of fame, yet after you have done all that, you are still just an individual created by God, an individual who has every reason to do what the world does not do, to give God the glory. If you did it, no matter how great or noteworthy, it wasn't you, your talents, your abilities. It was and always will be God working through you. Surely, He deserves credit whenever credit is due.

3. Charles Dickens may have spent an entire novel focusing on the accomplishments of an orphan named Pip. Yet with three phrases, with a mere six words, our God overwhelms us with expectations, with expectations that leave us saying, "Lord, grant me the power to move one step closer to Your great expectations of me!" Amen.