

Have you ever had the devastating realization that your expectation was not met? Maybe it was hope in a new diet routine that turned out to be a bust, a political movement that turned out to not be as good as you had hoped, or maybe hope that a person was genuine and authentic with you and they turned out not to be who you thought they were.

Perhaps, what your expectation was not even wrong, maybe you just did not have all of the information and with the new information coming to light you had a change of heart.

In the post apocalyptic movie series, The Hunger Games, the United States is no longer a country and instead becomes a new country called Pan-am. This country is ruled by the elite class, the rich one percent, who live in the city called the capital... clever right? The rest of the country is divided into 13 districts, where the people are made to live in poverty. However, district 13 rebels against President Snow

and the other elite rulers in the capital. So the capital's military supposedly destroys district 13. This is meant as a warning to the other districts, who may want to rebel themselves.

Another scare tactic and pre-punishment for any other form of rebellion is every year they select two children from each district- a girl and a boy between the ages of 10 to 18- To compete in what they call the hunger games.

These games are broadcast nationally and every citizen is forced to watch the games in their district's town square. This might be fun if the games were the super bowl or the world series, however these children are put in a game where they must compete for their lives. Out of all the 24 children selected, only one will live. They will fight and kill each other, as well as creatures in the game.

The series follows Katniss Everdeen, a brave girl who volunteers to take her sister's place in the hunger games. She ends up beating the game and saves another player.

*This sparks a rebellion among the districts against the capitol and their cruel ways. She even discovers that district 13 is alive and well. They are living underground with their own president, who seems to be an answer to a prayer.

However, when they finally take over the capital and capture President Snow, Katniss learns that her new district 13 president, who she thought was an answer to the people's prayers, is planning on having the children of the capital compete to the death. She realizes that this new president sold her a quick and easy peaceful salvation. This promise she was sold was nothing more than a mirage for the new president to get power and inflict more violence on innocent children.

Don't worry, the series does have a happy and satisfying ending, in which there are no more hunger games or corrupt leaders. But the moment when you get to see Katniss realize that everything she thought she knew-

That she had found a leader she could believe in-

That the violence that had been inflicted on the lives of innocents for years was coming to an end-

The moment she realized that what she had hoped for and expected was not going to happen was devastating.

The disciples may have understood better than us what Katniss was feeling in the moment she realized that her leader did not meet her expectations. The Jewish people had been hoping and waiting for a Messiah-

A messiah they believed was going to come and overthrow the oppressive Roman Empire. This Messiah would rule from the Temple and bring peace to the Jewish people. This is what they believed the prophets had foretold, and this is the messiah they were waiting for.

The Disciples would have been no exception to that. There are many times that Jesus shocked them and rattled

their expectations. Including today's scripture, See, we must remind our 21st century western minds that the Jewish people believe that the temple is God's permanent resting place. That is where you went to have an encounter with God. The idea that God's temple would be destroyed would have seemed like the end of the world as they knew it. The temple in Jerusalem would be destroyed in 70 A.D. during the Roman Jewish wars.

We know that the world will continue to thrive many centuries after the destruction of the temple, but to them, this was a painful shattering of expectations. This was their world being shaken upside down. They may even be realizing that Jesus is not going to turn into a warrior messiah and give them the ending they had hoped for.

I wonder how many times our expectations are not met by God?

Sometimes we get too focused on the way we think our prayers should be answered that we miss when God is answering them. *PAUSE*

It reminds me of that story of a man who is shipwrecked on an island. He starts praying for God to rescue him and about that time a boat comes by. The boat stops and offers the man a ride. The man replies “no thank you, God will save me.” So the boat leaves.

Shortly after a plane arrives on the Island, and offers the man a ride. The man responds again, “No thank you, God will save me.” So the plane leaves. A few more hours go by and the man cries out, “Oh God, I have been praying for you to save me. Why haven’t you?” God responds, “Well I sent you a boat and an airplane. What more do you want!”

We get so bogged down in the details of how we believe God should be answering our prayers or behaving that we miss the boat and airplane God sent us. That is the point Jesus is trying to make in today's scripture.

We see that the disciple is admiring the Temple. What large stones! And Jesus tells him that all of these large amazing buildings will be destroyed one day. One day, they will all come tumbling down. Later, when some of the disciples ask Jesus when these things will happen, Jesus responds that many empires will fall and many wars will happen.

What Jesus is trying to tell the disciples is that these events are not the end of the world. He is telling them that even though it feels like the end of the world when these things happen, do not fear. The end is still to come. This is the beginning of birthpangs. What seems to be destruction and chaos is actually to make way for new life to be born.

Jesus is using the metaphors of the temple being destroyed and the pain of child labor to challenge them. Jesus is challenging the disciples to let go of what they think ought to be and embrace the kingdom of God. He is saying, “hey, don’t put your faith in this building. This building does not contain God. This building won’t last forever. Pay attention to what I am telling you. Pay attention and you might see that salvation is here, now. That the kingdom of God is at hand. Don’t be distracted by false leaders, who offer you quick and easy salvation. That is too good to be true. Pay attention now and you will see that reality is far greater than your expectations.”

PAUSE

One of the most frustrating things in my life is not having all the answers. I thought when I accepted the call to ministry and went to seminary that I would somehow get some magical insight- that God would tell me exactly what God was

thinking and when. I would know all the answers and truth about God. And I would try as a seminary student, to put God into these boxes. I would learn something new, then be like okay so that new thing means God is this, and I would put God in that box. I would then see something I'd consider a sign from God, so I would have to take God out of that old box that did not fit him anymore and put him into this new box.

Finally towards the end of my second year of seminary, I went to one of my professor's office hours and informed him that my struggle to define God was over. I told him about all the little boxes and labels that I put God in. I was so proud and arrogant. Dr. Jung looked at me and said, "I am sorry to inform you of this, but if you think you have God figured out, it isn't God."

PAUSE

That moment changed my life. When we stop putting God in boxes and remove our expectations, that is when we

get to experience real grace and salvation. When we stop seeking signs and answers for all of our questions, and instead lean into the uncomfortable questions, we will one day realize we are living into our answers.

That is what Jesus is trying to tell the disciples. The Disciples see the Temple as the sign of God's presence. By doing so, they miss that God's presence is all around them. They see the temple as the place where you encounter God and they are missing that God is among them... healing the sick, feeding thousands...

They are missing that the kingdom of God, that the salvation they seek, is with them. I wonder what would happen to us if we stopped trying to make God who we want God to be and just started being present to who God is? If we stop putting God into boxes, or assuming we know more than God, what would our lives be like? What would our relationship with God look like? Would we come to find that

the kingdom of God and Salvation are a lot closer than we could have imagined.... Amen.