

BaptistWay Bible Series for March 13: Jesusâ€œtruly the way

March 1, 2011

I must confess that I am a Dallas Cowboys fan. Some of you may mock me, others pity me, but deep down many of you sympathize with me because you suffer from the same affliction. Being a fan of the Cowboys is like riding a neverending rollercoaster. There are times of great joy and excitement followed by some slow mundane and even boring stretches of time. There are times of fear and eye-covering moments as well as moments you just feel sick. If drama and continuous change is what you want, then this is the sports team for you. I do not know the reason, but I am a committed fan despite many who have given up and question my sanity.

As I look back at my relationship with the Cowboys, I realize the most frustrating times were when my expectations of the team did not match with reality. There have been times, such as this past year, when the Cowboys have performed well below their capabilities; however, many times they performed as they should have, but caused me frustration because my expectations were too high and unrealistic. I have learned that in order to continue being a Cowboy's fan, I must remove all expectations and just enjoy the rollercoaster ride.

We tend to develop preconceived ideas regarding just about everything, including people, movies, politics, countries, religions, churches, denominations and the list continues on and on. Unfortunately, we usually are making these judgments on misunderstandings or our own biases.

When we allow our expectations to guide the way we think and act, we no longer are living in reality, but rather our own perceived reality created by

our own limited expectations. When we live this way, we are walking a tightrope, and the wind is beginning to blow. As soon as reality does not match our own preconceived expectations, life may seem out of control.

This is the situation the disciples find themselves in when Jesus begins to talk about his betrayal and death in John 13:31-14:14. Imagine how excited the disciples must have been. They had been following Jesus about three years and had come to realize this man was the Messiah.

The march into Jerusalem earlier in the week must have reinforced the notion that now was the time. The Messiah was going to take his rightful place as king. As they gathered with Jesus, the disciples probably were expecting Jesus to lay out his strategy for retaking the city from Roman control and then reclaiming the 12 tribes of Israel as his own. The nation would be strong again, united under God. These were expectations built on tradition and misunderstanding. Reality was going to be much different.

Instead of a master battle plan, Jesus began talking about his own death and betrayal. There is no doubt the disciples were confused and concerned. Had they given up three years of their life only to see the end marked with death? Jesus was falling short of their expectations, and they were trying to make sense of their unraveling hopes that had been based on Jesus being the Messiah.

Peter bravely stated his undying loyalty to Jesus. Peter loved Jesus with passion, but Jesus knew Peter's expectations would be destroyed and even the brave and loyal Peter would deny Jesus. Peter was not ready for his Messiah to die, and when faced with that reality, Peter found his life spinning out of control and his natural thought was self-preservation, which led to denying the one he loved.

Thomas asked Jesus to clarify where he was going, because Thomas wanted to go with him. Thomas was looking for the battle plan and desired

to play his part. Jesus' answer only brought more confusion because the preconceived expectations of the Disciples were being shattered. Thomas' ideas about Jesus are going to be destroyed, and he began to doubt everything he had believed.

Philip pleads with Jesus to offer them some hope and show them he truly is from God. After all the signs Jesus had performed, Philip needed another sign as soon as his expectations started to fade.

I nearly can hear the tone of Jesus' voice and see his compassionate gaze as he senses the discomfort of the disciples. Jesus knows the expectations of the disciples are unraveling, and he knows the words he speaks may not bring comfort or strength just yet. However, the words he gives are powerful and will replace the unrealistic expectations of the disciples with truth that never can be shaken.

Jesus promises he has prepared a place for us. Our future is secure in him. Jesus states he is the way, the truth and the life. Through him, we find the way to live our lives for God and enter into a relationship with our heavenly Father. Jesus also reminds us he is God, and through him, we will be strengthened and enabled to live our lives for God. Jesus' words replace the shaky ground of our own expectations and give us a firm foundation of truth.

We all need to be cautious of letting our expectations of God cloud our relationship with him. When we feel God is not following our plan, we need to go back to his words of truth: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me" (John 14:1). "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me" (v. 3) "I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (v. 6). These are words we can hold onto when our expectations of life are crashing around us.

When have your expectations of God been based on tradition or misunderstanding like the disciples? Have unrealistic expectations of God hurt your relationship with him? In times of confusion and trouble, do you turn to the truth God has given us, or do you rely on your own understanding? Will you allow God to strip away your expectations and replace them with the truth of his love, hope and strength?