

FULL FAITH PART 2

**GREAT  
EXPECTATIONS**



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**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*Great Expectations*

Great Expectations  
Full Faith Part 2  
A *ReVision* Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe  
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*Great Expectations*

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## Welcome to *Great Expectations*

Welcome to *Great Expectations*, an overview of our covenant relationship with God, and of the promises He invites us to claim. *Great Expectations* is Part 2 of a 10-part series entitled, *Full Faith*, and is one of our *ReVision* series of studies in Kingdom living.

In the life of following Jesus, we need to know what to expect. Christian faith – true and *full* faith – involves not only the inward assurance of forgiveness and eternal life, but the outward evidence of a life wholly devoted to following Jesus in every area of life. We will only realize full faith as we look to Jesus for our vision of the Christian life, and as we strive to attain the expectations He holds out for us. And what Jesus promises – not only for then and there, but here and now – is nothing short of amazing.

These studies are designed for individual or group use. While you may derive much benefit from studying on your own, that benefit can be greatly enhanced by joining with a friend or a group to read, discuss, share, challenge, and pray for one another.

Take one lesson at a time. Read through the study and reflect on the questions provided. Be sure to do the *Next steps* assignment each day, as this will help you put your learning into practice. Use the questions at the end of the study to reflect on what you have learned.

These studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your understanding of the Christian faith, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God, and life in His Kingdom.

If you have not already, we invite you to subscribe to *ReVision* so that you can receive it daily on your computer, tablet, or smart phone. Visit our website, [www.ailbe.org](http://www.ailbe.org), where you can subscribe to *ReVision* and our other newsletters.

Our prayer is that this study will enlarge your vision of Christ and His Kingdom, and encourage you to greater faith, boldness, and consistency in living for Him.

T. M. Moore  
Principal

## 1 Small Vision, Small Faith

*Then Peter answered and said to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?"* Matthew 19.27

### *Living up to our vision*

We were in the midst of a heated conversation about the state of the Church in America, and the students were becoming increasingly urgent to understand why Christians aren't more effective in transforming our world.

What's wrong with us? Do we lack resources or opportunities? Do Christians simply not care about the state of culture and society? About the last, the least, and the lost? Are we and our churches really as irrelevant as our unbelieving neighbors think?

Eventually the conversation turned to pastors and whether they might be part of the problem. Pastors, after all, are the leaders and disciple-makers – those to whom we're called to submit (Heb. 13.17) – and, as Jesus observed, no one will rise above the level of his or her leader (Jn. 13.16). Finally, one student asked, "Is this the best we can hope for from our pastors? I mean, do you think pastors are working up to the level of their ability?"

I answered without hesitation, "No. I think pastors, by and large, are earnest, sincere, eager to do a good job, and highly gifted. I think most of them are working pretty hard, and they would doubtless say they're doing the best they can. The problem is not that they're working up to the level of their *ability*; rather, it's that they're only working up to the level of their *vision*."

In life, you see, it's always a case of what you see is what you get.

### *Too low, too distant*

Christian faith – *full* faith – is both an inward assurance of forgiveness and eternal life, and an outward life chock full of evidence that we have placed our hope in powerful and transforming unseen realities that we see with the eye of faith. In the Christian faith we won't rise any higher in our experience than what we hope in and focus on. This is true not only for pastors, but for every follower of Jesus Christ. This is why Peter's question to Jesus is so very important: What about us, Lord? What can we expect? What is there for us who have left everything to follow You?

Peter wanted to get it right, and he didn't want to miss out on anything that should have been coming to him as a follower of Christ.

For many believers, I fear, their expectations about being a Christian suffer from being too low and too distant – too low, because they have not grasped the incredible transforming power of the Gospel to make all things new in their lives, and too distant because they reserve most of their expectations for after they have departed this life and gone to be with the Lord.

But since we have eternal life here and now, and have, in a certain sense, already arrived at our eternal destination – our then and there (Heb. 12.22-24) – should we not expect *more* of our Christian life in the here and now?

*What, then, to expect?*

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Many Christians are living their faith primarily with a view to the future – the far distant future. The full and abundant life they hope for means, essentially, going to heaven when they die.

Of course they understand there is some benefit now, but that comes mainly in the form of *assurance* of salvation and probably some measure of *comfort* in the midst of the vicissitudes of daily life – inward and personal promises and truths. But when our vision of the life of faith is primarily of what we will realize in another world and another time, our *practice* of the faith here and now is not likely to be all that exciting or transformational. Hoping above all for heaven when we die, we hold to a relatively small vision of the Christian life for our everyday experience.

And a small vision of the faith leads to a small faith in our daily practice. It's that simple, and it's not full faith.

Peter's question is therefore enormously important: Lord, with respect to my having decided to follow You, what should I expect? What difference should believing in You make in my life? What's supposed to be happening, and what am I supposed to do? What does full faith in Jesus entail, and for what may I therefore hope?

Every believer should ask himself or herself these questions every day. And then wait, listen carefully, and understand clearly the great expectations Jesus holds out for all who have truly committed themselves to Him.

### *For reflection*

1. What do we mean by "vision"? How would you describe your vision of the Christian life?
2. Do you agree that churches in this country need a different vision? Explain.
3. What do you look to as expectations for your walk with and work for the Lord?

*Next steps: Talk with your pastor and some church leaders. What is their vision of the Christian life? What expectations do they seek as followers of Christ?*

### *Prayer:*

## 2 First of All

*Then Peter answered and said to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?" So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Matthew 19.27, 28*

### *Things forsaken*

Recall the way Peter qualified his question. The question Peter asked the Lord was not phrased to elicit an answer relative to *any* human being, or even anyone who might profess to believe in Jesus. Peter's question related to those who "have left all and followed" Jesus. Peter's question, in other words, is the question of those who are seeking full faith and who want to know what to expect.

Jesus' answer is directed specifically to Peter's question. Thus, before we explore His answer in any detail, we need to make sure that the great expectations He holds out to Peter are the ones we are free to hope for ourselves.

There are two facets to Peter's question. The first relates to *things forsaken*. Peter said that he and the other disciples had "left all." These men had all spent years occupied with making a living, fitting in with their communities, minding their own business, and taking care of all the daily routine activities and responsibilities that went along with this way of life.

But when Jesus called them, everything in their lives changed. In a very real sense, old things had passed away (2 Cor. 5.17). The old occupations and diversions that had filled up their lives were now replaced by a determination to be with Jesus and to learn from Him "the words of eternal life" (Jn. 6.68). Those who had wives still loved and took care of their wives; and certainly not all of those who followed Jesus forsook their vocations to become apostles and preachers.

But for all those, regardless of their station in life, who had "left all" to follow Jesus, everything in their lives was cast into a new framework, everything they did had a new purpose, and they began to pursue everything from a new perspective. Those who had been notorious sinners turned from their wicked ways, while those whose sins were subtler and less public also took seriously Jesus' calls to repentance. And all of them began to make room in their lives for new disciplines, new practices, and new kinds of activities and relationships.

### *Things pursued*

The second facet of Peter's question related to *things pursued* – the new focus he and others had embraced. They were following Jesus. He called them to embrace a new perspective on their lives (Matt. 6.33) and to embrace a new quality of life, mirroring the righteousness of God's Law (Matt. 5.17-19). He called them to make love for God and their neighbors the defining motif of all their relationships, roles, and responsibilities (Matt. 22. 34-40). Jesus took them to places they had never been before: among the sick and demon-possessed, in confrontations with the power brokers of their day, to feed the poor and destitute, to call sinners to repentance and faith, to love one another as Jesus loved them. And He commissioned them to the task of being witnesses and making disciples, regardless of their place or station in life (Acts 1.8; Matt. 28.18-20).

Jesus called them to "seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matt. 6.33), and this is what they were determined to do.

*This one thing...*

## *Great Expectations*

The Apostle Paul echoed the commitment of Peter and the other disciples. He too counted everything that was precious to him as loss so that he could follow Jesus (Phil. 3.8-14). And he set himself as an example for all who would believe, everyone who intends to practice full faith in Jesus (1 Tim. 1.16).

As disciples of Jesus we are not all called to give up our families, jobs, or places of living in order to follow Jesus, though for some of us, such sacrifices may be necessary. Rather, we are called to forsake old ways of thinking and living – clinging to material things, wasting time in frivolous and self-indulgent diversions, fretting and fussing about this, that, and the other, taking advantage of others, and always looking out only for ourselves. All this we leave behind as we take up the full faith calling to follow Jesus into every area of our lives with a new outlook, new purpose, and new power for seeking and advancing the Kingdom of God.

Like those first believers, we who are called to follow Jesus count everything in our lives as loss; we leave behind everything that hinders our discipleship, and we relegate everything else in our lives to a place of strictly secondary importance compared to the charge of following Jesus, of seeking the high prize of the upward calling of God in Christ (Phil. 3.8-14).

Is this where we are? Can we truly say with Peter that we have left everything – everything – to follow Jesus? To such as these – and *only* such as these – Jesus holds out great expectations indeed.

### *For reflection*

1. Things forsaken, things pursued: In what ways does this define your experience of following Jesus?
2. Meditate on Ephesians 5.15-17. How does following Jesus affect the way you use your time each day?
3. What evidence do you expect to see in your life that following Jesus is making a difference?

*Next steps: The Kingdom of God is the rule of King Jesus, which He is unfolding on earth as it is in heaven. What does it mean to “seek” this Kingdom? Talk with a Christian friend about this question.*



### 3 A Question of Timing

*Then Peter answered and said to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?" So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Matthew 19.27, 28*

#### *The new world*

We mentioned earlier that the problem with many Christians is that they have a too-distant vision of the Christian life. They have postponed much of the excitement and transforming power of faith to the "then and there" of eternal life. In the "here and now" they mostly count on feeling assured of salvation to keep up their hopes for after their lives have ended. Surely, they insist, living forever in glory with the Lord will be the culmination of all the great expectations our Lord holds out to us.

The culmination, yes, but not the sum total.

We must be very careful to hear the Lord concerning what He promises. How He answered Peter concerning *when* to expect what he sought in his question is extremely important. Hear Jesus again, "in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne..." When these two conditions are met, then what Jesus promises will begin to be realized.

When is the "regeneration", and when will Jesus be seated on His glorious throne?

Jesus says that when the age of regeneration begins, then the great expectations He holds out will be available to all who have left everything to follow Him. That will also be the time, Jesus explains, when He takes His seat at the right hand of God.

Now the Scriptures are abundantly clear that this era has already begun. Jesus has ascended to glory and is seated at the right hand of God. The work of regeneration – of saving lost souls – has been going on for 2,000 years.

We live in the age of regeneration; we live in the period of history over which Jesus rules from His throne in heaven. We live, here and now, in the age of full faith and great expectations.

#### *The rule of the Lord*

We know this is true because the Scriptures teach that Jesus has ascended to the right hand of God and taken His seat there, on His glorious eternal throne (Ps. 110, Col. 3.1-3; Heb. 1.3). From His throne on high Jesus is building His Church, advancing His Kingdom, gathering His elect, and putting all His enemies under His feet. The rule of King Jesus is established, and His Kingdom is advancing on earth, as it is in heaven, as believers seek it in every area of their lives.

Indeed, all who follow Jesus are instructed to make this great unseen reality – Christ exalted and ruling – the orienting vista of all their daily experience (Col. 3.1-3). We are even assured that we ourselves have, in a certain sense, been seated there with the Lord Jesus (Eph. 2.5, 6)!

What a glorious privilege! What a commanding perspective from which to look out on our everyday lives! What assurance such hoped-for things affords, and what an abundance of Spirit-filled evidence flows from the lives of all who live in the light of such unseen things (Heb. 11.1; Jn. 7.37-39).

#### *Our own experience*

### *Great Expectations*

We also know that the time for Jesus' great expectations has arrived because we ourselves have experienced the regenerating power of the Gospel. We may not know the answer to every unbeliever's objections to Christianity; we may not be able to articulate all the nuances and subtleties of the Christian worldview; and we undoubtedly all still have a long way to go in our sanctification; but, like the blind man of John 9, this much we know: Whereas once we were blind, now we can see. Once we were dead in our trespasses and sins, and now we are alive, truly, really, gloriously alive because of Jesus. Once we were without hope, without purpose, without peace, and without joy, and now we have Jesus, Who is our all in all.

No one can deny or take from us the utter reality of the regeneration we have come to know through the Gospel.

Jesus is on His throne, and the age of regeneration is well under way. And in this glorious time, we have left everything in order to ascend to this new perspective and follow Jesus. What, then, are the great expectations Jesus holds out for us *now*?

#### *For reflection*

1. How did you come to the "regeneration" and Kingdom of Jesus Christ?
2. How do you experience the regenerating work of Jesus in your life?
3. How would you explain to someone else how to enter into "the regeneration"?

*Next steps: Get with another believer and talk through your answers to the three questions above. Begin praying that God will give you opportunities to share your experience of Jesus with others.*

## 4 A Promise of Rule

*Then Peter answered and said to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?" So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Matthew 19.27, 28*

### *The essence of truth*

We know that Jesus often spoke in parables and metaphors. He did this, not to confuse His followers, but to open up their imaginations to realities and possibilities they'd either never considered or never observed.

When we remember that Jesus' answer to Peter's question relates to the time in which we presently live – the age of regeneration, when Jesus is ruling from His throne in heaven – we have to conclude that His comments about thrones, judging, and the twelve tribes of Israel are for *this* time, and for *all* who follow Jesus as His disciples (Matt. 28.18-20). Thus, we must conclude that His *specific* words to Peter are intended to be strictly metaphorical, to *suggest* rather than *explicitly to describe*.

Yet just because Jesus' words are metaphorical doesn't mean they aren't true. What is the essence of truth Jesus wants His disciples to gather from this metaphor?

It is simply this: On earth, among the people of God, those who have left everything to follow Jesus are called to serve.

### *Servant-rulers*

Recall the story of Jesus washing the disciples' feet in the upper room (Jn. 13.1-15).

That story is introduced by our being told that all authority in heaven and earth had been given to Jesus and that He was about to ascend His glorious throne. All rule and power was given to Jesus at that moment. His throne and glory awaited Him, following the humiliation of the cross and the triumph of the resurrection.

So how did Jesus celebrate this great achievement and endowment? By washing His disciples' feet. Jesus washed His disciples' feet and told us that just as we had seen Him do, we must do for one another as well.

Even now, at the right hand of God, the Lord Jesus is employed in daily intercessions for His people (Heb. 7.25). He serves as our Advocate and Intercessor, and He rules all things by His Word of power to bless and care for us, His flock. Further, He sends out His Spirit and His holy angels to attend to our needs and protect us on our journey. He upholds the cosmos and makes all things His servants (Heb. 1.3; Ps. 119.89-91). Paul tells us that Jesus is putting everything in heaven and earth under His feet, at His disposal, for the sake of caring for His people, His Church (Eph. 1.22, 23).

Jesus, our King and Savior, is working on our behalf as He reigns at the Father's right hand. What a strange way to think about a King, as the Servant of His subjects! Yet this is how we must think of Jesus, and this is how we must think about our own callings as His followers, here and now.

We must expect, that is, that Jesus will fit and deploy us in works of love to serve others, following His own example, and in His own power and Word.

### *Serving like Jesus*

We who have left everything to follow Jesus are seated with Him on His royal throne. So what should we expect to be the nature of our own activity as "rulers" and "judges" among the people of God? We, like

### *Great Expectations*

Jesus, are called to serve. If you are a follower of Jesus, you have been appointed to serve. In our former lives we only ever asked, “What’s in it for me?” In the regeneration and Kingdom of Jesus we ask only, “How can I serve others with the love of Jesus?” Knowing that we are not fit for service, and must be equipped, we turn daily to the Word of God and seek the Lord earnestly in prayer, that we may be fitted for every good work and empowered to do whatever our Lord commands (2 Tim. 3.15-17; Matt. 21.22). And we look to leaders and Christian brethren to help us in becoming better equipped to serve others with the love of Christ (Eph. 4.11, 12; Heb. 10.24).

If serving others by the ministry of the Word of God is not what you have embraced as the life of faith, then it should be evident that you are not where Jesus is, and not where they are to whom He holds out the great expectations of our text.

You are not living full faith in Jesus unless serving others in His Name defines your daily walk with and work for the Lord.

#### *For reflection*

1. What gifts has the Lord given you for serving others? What opportunities for serving are you presented with each day?
2. What are the greatest obstacles we have to overcome to live as servant-rulers?
3. How can Christians encourage and assist one another in this great calling (Heb. 10.24)?

*Next steps: Meditate on Philippians 2.5-11. What did Jesus give up in order to become a servant? What are you called to give up in order to follow Him in this way? Talk with a pastor or church leader about these questions.*

## 5 Serving by the Word

*Then Peter answered and said to Him, "See, we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?" So Jesus said to them, "Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. Matthew 19.27, 28*

### *Called to judge*

What should we expect in this age of regeneration, when Jesus is ruling at the right hand of God? What does He hold out for us as great expectations for all who have left everything to follow Him in full faith?

He promises that we will rule *with* Him and *like* Him. Which is to say, He promises us the great and glorious privilege of serving others and judging the people of God according to His Word.

It seems strange, I suppose, that Jesus would hold out to us the expectation of judging others. After all, did He not instruct us *not* to do so (Matt. 7.1)? Well, not exactly. He warned us that we would be judged by the same standard we use in judging others (Matt. 7.2); however, Jesus also instructed us to judge with *righteous* judgment (Jn. 7.29). Who of us would not be willing to be judged by others according to such a standard of truth, fairness, mercy, and love? And how can we learn to judge this way ourselves?

### *Judges in Israel*

The disciples would have heard Jesus' words through the filter of their experience of judges in the nation of Israel. Those who were judges in Israel *served* the people of God primarily by the ministry of the Word. Judges were appointed in every city among the tribes of Israel, and their responsibility was to instruct, guide, protect, and oversee their community according to the Law of God, that is, according to God's standards for liberty and love.

These judges, like Ezra (Ezra 7.10), were expected to devote themselves to daily reading, study, and discussion of the Word of God, laboring to understand the Scriptures and to make certain their own lives were in line with the will of God. Then they would join together in the gates of the city to teach and apply the Scriptures to the lives of the people. The story of Ruth and Boaz, in Ruth 4, is a perfect example of this system at work. The judges gathered – men of reputation and sound Scriptural learning – so that they could interpret the Word of God and apply it to a particular situation, with the result that the blessings of God abounded to all.

Thus by the work of the judges, their ministries of the Word of God, love for God and neighbor would obtain and prevail in all the cities of Israel.

### *Equipped to equip*

This is what Jesus is calling His followers to do here and now. We are co-regents with Him, all of us who have left everything to follow Jesus. We sit on thrones with Him, metaphorically speaking, and we have been appointed to serve as teachers, enablers, and helpers of others according to the counsel and instruction of His Word.

But we need to work hard at fulfilling this high calling. We must be equipped for ministry by faithful leaders so that we can contribute to Jesus' work of building His Church (Eph. 4.11-16). We can only do this, only fulfill our calling to judge the people of God, as we devote ourselves to the Word of God and keep alert to opportunities for serving others.

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The followers of Jesus must study the Bible diligently and daily, but not merely with a view to learning its contents or gaining some “feel good” experience or some assuring word from the Lord. We are called to be equipped by Scripture for every good work, for only thus will we be ready to “make the most” of every opportunity for serving others that is presented to us each day (Eph. 5.15-17).

Jesus promises all those who have left everything to follow Him in full faith that He will give them authority, power, and abundant opportunities to “judge” the people of God, that is, to serve our fellow believers by the good works with which we are equipped through reading and studying the Bible. We must seek the Lord to make us zealous for such good works, and to equip us and make us ready for them (Tit. 2.14, 3.1). We must be devoted to good works of serving and judging (Tit. 3.14), so that we do not grow weary of doing good for others, beginning with those who share with us in following Jesus (Gal. 6.9, 10).

For it is in fulfilling this role as servants and judges that we will advance the rule of King Jesus and know the full and abundant life only Jesus can give (Jn. 10.10).

### *For reflection*

1. What does it mean to judge with righteous judgment? How well prepared for this are you at this time?
2. The Bible can equip us for “every good work” (2 Tim. 3.15-17). We can glorify God in whatever we do (1 Cor. 10.31). How can we begin to see *all* our works each day as opportunities to do good and glorify God?
3. Is the time you have in God’s Word each day sufficient – in duration and quality – to equip you for a life zealous and devoted to good works?

*Next steps: Talk with a pastor, church leader, or another believer about how you might make better use of your time in God’s Word to equip you for every good work.*

## 6 Abundance on Every Hand

*“And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name’s sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.”* Matthew 19.29

### *The promise of happiness*

Conceptions of happiness differ from age to age. There are, of course, similarities: most societies and peoples include some concept of wealth and family as part of their vision of happiness. Happiness involves enjoying the things one loves and desire most, free from threat of harm, together with the people one loves the most.

This is what Jesus promises to those who have left everything to follow Him. This is what we may expect as we take up full-faith pursuit of Christ and His Kingdom and righteousness. Jesus told Peter and all His followers that whatever regret or sorrow or sense of loss they may experience by leaving all behind to follow Him will be more than replaced to overflowing in the here and now, as well as then and there forever.

But we need to make sure we understand this aspect of Jesus’ promises and our great expectations according to two historical settings.

### *Expectations in Israel*

The first of these is that of ancient Israel. Jesus’ words in this text were a kind of summary of what God promised the people of Israel in Deuteronomy 28.1-14. The people of Israel had left everything they’d known in Egypt to follow Moses into the promised land of Canaan. There God held out for them great expectations of abundance – family, lands, harvests, safety, fullness of joy. Jesus is tapping into this setting in order to say to His followers, “Everything you could ever need or want in the way of provisions, possessions, friends, and family – all the covenant blessings of God – you will have when you follow Me.”

The essence of God’s covenant promises to Israel is that *He would be their God* and would bless them and make them a blessing to the world. The material, cultural, and social blessings they would know in the land of Canaan were strictly indicators or tokens of the presence and favor of God, Whom to know is true, full, and joyous life. Jesus answered Peter’s question by saying that everything God promised His people in His covenant would be theirs by following Jesus, for *in Jesus* and *only in Jesus* all the promises of God are “Yes” and “Amen.” (cf. 2 Cor. 1.20). He would meet all their needs out of His riches and glory (Phil. 19). He would strengthen them to do all His will (Phil. 2.13, 4.13). He would be with them, and never fail nor forsake them (Matt. 28.20; Heb. 13.5). He would give them fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore, merely by bringing them into His presence, day after day after day (Ps. 16.11).

This promise of blessing must be understood within a second historical context, that of the first Christian community in Jerusalem. These were the first people to enter into the age of regeneration and to ascend the throne with Jesus, from there to serve one another according to the good works of His Word. They were the first to show us what true happiness together looks like in the Lord. How did they do this?

### *The first Christians*

They did this by immersing themselves in Jesus and His Word, so that, loving and caring for one another, they freely gave of their possessions to meet the needs of their fellow believers and reach out to others with the Gospel.

We read of this in Acts 2, Acts 4, Acts 8, and Acts 11. So powerfully was the love of Christ at work among those first Christians, that they freely and readily sacrificed their own interests and needs to make sure that others’ needs were met day by day. “There was not “anyone among them who lacked” anything they needed

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each day, Luke tells us (Acts 4.34). Their love was palpable – a grace you could “see” (Acts 11.23). They had their struggles, to be sure – “fightings and fears within” (Acts 5, 6) and “without” (Acts 3, 5, 7, 8, 12). Yet so outside the norm was the love they demonstrated for one another that it attracted the attention of their neighbors, leading many to follow their example by forsaking their old lives and pursuing Jesus in this new community of covenant blessing (cf. Acts 6.1-6).

All those who leave everything to follow Jesus can know the fullness of God’s covenant blessing *by knowing and living in Jesus Christ*, and they are called to share that blessing with the people to whom God sends them each day. Our happiness is not in things, but in Jesus. Our peace is not in secure circumstances but in Jesus. Our provision is from Jesus. Our strength is in Jesus. Our joy, and the love we need for serving and judging others, is from Jesus.

But is this what we see in the churches of our day? Do those who profess Jesus really find Him to be their all in all, or do they merely regard Him as the convenient Supplier of every good thing they might want or need? And if so, are they not rather idolaters than practitioners of full faith in the Lord?

What Jesus extends to Peter and all who follow Jesus with him is fullness of joy, satisfaction of their every need, abundant life here and now, and assurance of everlasting life then and there, *in Him, and in Him alone*.

And all who look to Jesus in full faith know that He is able to promise such blessings and fulfill such great expectations because He Himself is their substance and their delight.

### *For reflection*

1. Meditate on Psalm 16.11. How do you experience this? When? Is this enough for you? Explain.
2. Paul says that Jesus is filling *all things in all things* (Eph. 1.23, 4.10). How do you experience that in your own life? How would you like to experience more of that?
3. What does it mean to say that Jesus is your “substance and delight”?

*Next steps: What could your church do to show more of the reality of Jesus’ love in its community? Talk with some of your fellow church members about this question.*



## 7 Last Things First – and Always

*“But many who are first will be last, and the last first.”* Matthew 19:30

### *Our hope-filled forebears*

Peter asked Jesus what they could expect who had left everything to follow Him. Jesus replied by saying that all who follow Him in the age of regeneration will be equipped by God’s Word to serve and judge others, and will realize all the blessings and joy of God’s covenant promises within a worldwide community of loving, caring, witness-bearing believers like themselves.

Such great expectations must have satisfied the apostles and the earliest believers, because many, many of them gave up everything that people these days hold to be important, to follow Jesus in full faith. They left homes and families, the security of jobs and lands, diversions and distractions, safety and security, even their very lives. They forsook everything and followed Jesus, wherever He led them, day after day. They became “last” in the eyes of the world so that they could be “first” in the eyes of Christ.

How could they do that?

The period of the early Church is sometimes referred to as the age of martyrs. During the first 250 years of the Christian movement, wave after wave of violent persecution broke out against the followers of Christ, leaving multiplied thousands tortured, maimed, and murdered for their faith.

But what about the promise of abundance and joy in the safety of family and friends? The early Christians showed that they had found a prize of greater value even than all these. They had learned to embrace the *last* thing of the faith as the very *first* thing they hoped for every day.

### *Last place first*

In the terms and perspective of the world, those who are in “first place” have got it all. They’re the rich and famous, the powerful and admired, the beautiful people of the world. They drive the best cars, live in the nicest homes, have the most secure IRAs, and have plenty of leisure time to do with as they please. If the ads and commercials are right, this is the life most people want to realize, the life of being first, being best, being happy.

Those who are in “last place” have nothing of the sort – empty of every worldly pleasure or prize, despised, and with nothing of their own to claim. They have no goods to covet. They are looked down on and scorned by their neighbors. They having nothing in this world to which they can point in order to claim some status, privilege, or prize. They are the last of all, and few are they who are willing to settle for such an estate.

Yet Jesus said this is the greatest prize of all, because only thus, when we have laid aside every earthly privilege and delight, can we know the reality of eternal life in the Lord. The psalmist declared that God was his only good, his fullest cup, his true inheritance, and the only source of joy and pleasure he needed or wanted (Ps. 16). Delighting in the Lord, we find Him more than willing to give us the desires of our heart, which is to know and delight in Him more and more (Ps. 37:4).

We know that, in the new heavens and new earth, God will be all in all, and we will be with Him, in His presence, before Him, and like Him in a world where neither sin nor sorrow, want nor despair, will interrupt the joy and fullness we have in the presence of the Lord. While there will be much else to do in the new heavens and new earth, all of it will have meaning and joy only because we exist perpetually, uninterruptedly, and gloriously in the full light and truth of the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ.

## *Great Expectations*

### *Last now, first forever*

This is every true believer's *last* estate and highest hope; therefore, it must be the *first thing* we live for every day of our lives.

And when we empty ourselves of all this world's distractions and diversions, gewgaws and goods, pleasures and privileges, we open our souls to be filled, here and now, with all the fullness of God. Thus, setting aside what the world considers as of first importance, we daily and continuously embrace what *it* regards as of least significance so that we might bask and delight and flourish and be transformed in the eternal presence of Jesus Christ our King.

This is the believer's greatest expectation of all, to be last in the world's eyes and first in the Lord's, last in the world's treasures and first in the treasury of Christ's love, last in being esteemed and first in esteeming others better than ourselves, last in the securities of this world and first in the secure knowledge that our lives are hidden with Christ in God (Col. 3.3).

And this great expectation is ours to know, enjoy, and grow in every day of our lives, and for all eternity.

### *For reflection*

1. What do you look forward to in the new heavens and new earth? Do you expect to know *any* of that here and now? Explain.
2. How should following Jesus affect our view of everything the world regards as "first"?
3. What "great expectation" will you pursue in full faith today?

*Next steps: Download a copy of the PDF of this study for yourself and a friend. Work through it together to encourage one another in your walk with and work for the Lord.*

*Great Expectations*

*For reflection or discussion*

1. What would you say to a new believer about what he or she should expect from following Jesus?
2. Is the time you spend with Jesus in His Word and prayer sufficient to enable you to find all your fullness and joy in Him? Explain.
3. What does it mean for you to forsake all things – to become “last” – so that you can follow Jesus – Who is “first” – every day of your life?
4. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned from this study?
5. How are you planning to incorporate that lesson into your daily walk with and work for the Lord?

*Prayer:*

## The Fellowship of Ailbe

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We hope you found this study helpful. If so, please consider making a gift to The Fellowship. You can contribute to our ministry by using the donate button at the website, or by sending your gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, 19 Tyler Dr., Essex Junction, VT 05452.

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