

## Equipped to face the unexpected

Ever had a picture in your mind of what something or someone was like and then discovered that the reality was completely different to what you had imagined? I remember a few years ago James telling me about one of the guys he worked with and I began to build up a mental image of what Ken looked like. For some reason, I visualized him being tall, with a mass of dark, curly hair. Then one day, James brought home a commemorative group photograph of his workmates and there, in the front row, was Ken. Of course, I didn't know it was him because this guy in the photo was small, with straight, mousy-brown hair - he looked completely different from what I had imagined!

Or have you ever looked forward to something and the reality turned out nothing like what you had expected? Let me share with you an amusing experience when we were in Israel that fell into this category.

We had arrived in Capernaum, the headquarters of Jesus' Galilean ministry, and it was time for us to enjoy a "St Peter's fish" lunch. I love fish and I was looking forward to eating one that might have been caught in the Sea of Galilee. Perhaps it would taste like the fish Jesus had prepared for his disciples' breakfast on the Galilean shore...<sup>1</sup>

It was at Capernaum that the temple tax conversation between Jesus and Peter took place<sup>2</sup> and this is said to be the origin of the term "St Peter's fish". As we sat down at long tables waiting to be served, I wondered what the fish would be like. Perhaps it would be barbequed or maybe it would be served with a special middle-Eastern sauce. Then it happened. The waiters placed a dish in front of each of us, and there it was - our St Peter's fish - complete with head, eyes, tail and fins! Oh, no, I didn't think it would be like this! How could there be such a mismatch between expectation and reality...

As far as our St Peter's fish lunch was concerned, getting something different to what I had expected was no big deal. But, sometimes, unexpected outcomes can be a *very big* deal, especially if they're negative outcomes. Here are some that might be familiar to you:

- The marriage you thought would make you live happily ever after comes to an unpleasant end.
- Your children choose to reject biblical principles for living.
- Anticipation of a long and happy retirement is threatened by sudden illness.
- A seemingly successful business folds in the face of economic recession.
- Your move to another part of the country hasn't given you the fulfillment and satisfaction you thought it would.

As we go through life, we probably encounter dozens of mismatches between what we expect and what actually happens. The way we respond in these situations can make or break us. Do we angrily protest and demand to know why things haven't turned out well? Or do we choose to believe that God is good - all the time - and continue to praise Him despite our circumstances? I have a friend who is currently facing the unexpected through seriously ill health and she says this: "The Lord is in control and we praise His name because His will is being done in our lives, even though it is not necessarily the path we would have chosen for ourselves."

Whether or not our expectations are being met at the present time, God has promised that "*no eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him*".<sup>3</sup>

Whatever your expectations are at this moment, God has promised to surpass them all - one day! And we're not talking about fish lunches...

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<sup>1</sup> John 21

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 17:24-27

<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:9 (NIV)