



What Do You Expect?_(Part 1)

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Novelist Ray Bradbury, in his work *The Martian Chronicles*, tells the story of earthmen who visited the planet Mars. After they landed, they approached the nearest house to announce their coming. The four astronaut-explorers knocked on the door, only to be greeted by a brazen woman who scolds them for interrupting her baking. She speaks to her husband upstairs as the men wait outside. She returns with a simple note, and tells them to visit so-and-so down the street.

Expecting this so-and-so to be part of the welcoming committee, they are disappointed to discover that he is a talker who declares they "are not in his line of work." At one point he finally asks their business. They are from earth, sixty million miles away. The man, unimpressed, hands them a note and tells them to speak to another person down the way.

They arrive at this other person's office. "What would they like?" he asks. The captain of the earthmen,

relieved at the frank seriousness of the question, replies that he would like congratulation or an "atta-boy" or anything to welcome them after the long journey. The man grants their request and tells them to go to the room at the end of the hall.

The room was filled with the people of Mars. And when the captain entered and announced with a bold voice, "We're from Earth!" everyone shouted and danced. They hoisted the men on their shoulders and celebrated. After each earthman gave a short speech about Earth and the monumental feat of space travel, the crowd simmered. Then one of the Martians said, "I'm from Earth too!" Others joined in. Soon the crew realized they had been tricked into entering an insane asylum. One strange thing they discovered about this world was that Martians could see what other people were thinking.

The following morning a psychiatrist examines them. He asks them if they want to be cured of their hallucinations about coming from Earth. He warns them that the extreme cure is euthanasia. The four space travelers were glad to undergo the "cure" hoping it would convince the doctor to take them seriously.

The men took the doctor to their rocket ship on the side of a mountain. Not expecting to find an actual rocket ship, the doctor went aboard as the pleased astronauts waited outside. When the doctor exited, he said it was one of the most incredible things he'd ever seen. Yet instead of belief, he reached a wilder conclusion: a very complex hallucination. He felt the ship: tactile hallucination, he said. He smelled things on the ship: olfactory hallucination, he said. He heard the clinking in the ship: auditory hallucination, he said. He thought, seeing into the captain's mind, that the captain had conjured up the spaceship and the three crew members. The doctor then pulls a gun, declares the curable act of euthanasia, and shoots the captain. He marvels that the three crew members were still alive and protesting. So he shoots each of them, thinking they are illusions too. Then when all is quiet, the rocket still leaning against the mountain, the doctor becomes hysterical. The rocket did not disappear when the men were killed. He thinks the contagious disease had grown on him. He turns his gun on himself and his body falls to the ground beside the four earthmen.

It's a dark story. There is no happy ending here. Wouldn't it have been great if the people of Mars actually believed the astronauts? What were they

expecting foreign visitors to be like if they showed up on their planet? How would they know the truth?

Here's the parallel: In our current world today with so much skepticism, what does the modern and postmodern person expect to find for evidence that God visited our planet in the ancient world? Jesus of Nazareth shows up on planet earth, few believe him, and many want him dead.

The next few days I want to look at some signposts that indicate Earth was visited long ago in the person of Jesus. Just as in the story of the Martians, I believe the story of modernity and postmodernity has been a sad, dark one with decades of wars and the suicidal hopes of science and economics. We have talked ourselves out of the grand truths of God, the soul, and life everlasting in favor of the illusions of comfort and the shackling of lies. Let us not miss the good news that God has arrived.

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