

Don't You Understand?

Mark 8:11-21 (05/10/15)

Ernie Godshall
Faith Bible Church
Evansville, Indiana

Jesus and His men have just landed on the western coast of Galilee after feeding over 4000 souls in Decapolis. Now He runs into trouble on two fronts. Front number one is with His enemies and front number two is with His disciples, who just don't get it. "Do you not yet understand?" asks Jesus. They've been under His teaching now for at least two years and they've seen a breath-taking array of miracles, and yet Jesus has to say to them, "Do you not yet understand?" And really, they didn't.

What about you? You have heard a lot of gospel truth. You've heard God's Word. You've been around God's people. Do you really understand what is going on here? Do you understand the Christian faith? Do you understand to some degree the depths of truth in this Book? Do you understand the fall of Genesis 3 and its impact on this world with all the suffering we see? Do you understand the gospel that salvation is by grace alone? Do you grasp that? Have you submitted to it? Do you understand justification by faith alone? Do you understand what it means to be born again, to be a new creation in Christ? Do you understand the sufficiency of Christ for your life? Do you understand the doctrine and reality of progressive sanctification, how God changes His people into the likeness of Christ? Do you understand God's big purpose for your life? Would Jesus say the same thing to you, "Do you not yet understand?"

Let's learn three lessons from this leg of Jesus' ministry to help us in our understanding of spiritual truth.

You don't need more proof to understand who Christ is – vv. 10-13

10 And immediately He entered the boat with His disciples and came to the district of Dalmanutha. 11 The Pharisees came out and began to argue with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, to test Him. 12 Sighing deeply in His spirit, He said, "Why does this generation seek for a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation." 13 Leaving them, He again embarked and went away to the other side.

OUT COME THE WOLVES (v. 11) No sooner have they landed on the western shore of Galilee and these Pharisees "came out." Matthew includes the Sadducees. Here comes Jesus, sent from God, the light of the world to bring salvation to sinners, and these snapping, snarling wolves come out from their dens of darkness to attack Jesus, to try to engage Him in an argument. You might think they have sincere motives here, just wanting Jesus to give them a little more proof that He really is the Messiah, that He really is from God. No, they are asking for a sign for one reason: to discredit Him. They are just like people today who challenge us to prove to them that the Bible really is without error, or there really was a worldwide flood. These enemies of God are testing or tempting Him, trying to lure Him into their trap to prove to the people He really is a fake, just like all the other fakes around.

What kind of sign were they challenging Him to give them? More than all the miracles He's already performed. They may be thinking of things like, "Give the command and make the sun dance in the sky, or lightning to flash out of heaven. Or like Elijah make fire come down from heaven."

Listen, Christ is not on trial here; they are. He isn't under their authority; He's under His Father's authority. So just like Christ's enemies today, these evil, adulterous, religious leaders have come out of their institutes of higher learning, from their seed beds of apostasy, from their fortresses of skepticism and unbelief with the one goal of finding an excuse to get rid of Him. And, of course, He knows that.

JESUS TURNS AWAY (v. 12) Notice in verse 12, Jesus sighs deeply, a really strong word of inner groaning, probably of a mixture of anger, disgust, and grief over these blind people, these foes of God's truth and the gospel. Matthew includes Jesus' comments about how good they are at reading signs of the skies: Red in the morning, sailors' warning; sunset is clear, nothing to fear. But they are clueless about the signs of the times – that He has come fulfilling their Old Testament prophecies.

NO SIGNS NEEDED (v. 13) So He simply says, "You get no sign. You're not interested in the truth anyway. A sign wouldn't change anything." He knows they are plotting with the Herodians and Sadducees to crush Him. Look at verse 13 – "Leaving them...." This is tragic. This is like Romans 1 when God gives people over to their own unbelieving hearts. You don't want Jesus to do this with you, ever! He knows the Pharisees are avowed enemies and He will not cast His pearls before swine. This is why Martyn Lloyd-Jones refused to enter debates with unbelievers about Christianity. God isn't up for debate. God is to be worshiped and obeyed!

What about you? Do you understand that you don't need any more proof of the truthfulness of the Christian faith? Thousands of books have been written to prove that the Bible is true. But signs and proofs are not what you need. You have your Bible, and you have the gospel, and you have the empty tomb. If we could produce Noah's ark or David's slingshot or Jesus crown of thorns, or even if we could stand out there and perform miracles like Jesus and the Apostles did, would that convince you?

No, your biggest need is what these wolves did not have – conviction of sin and a humbled heart. You need to realize that God is holy and you are a sinner and you desperately need a Savior to give you forgiveness and eternal life. And then you need to get into God's Word and begin to feed on it. Your Bible is authenticated in your own heart by the Spirit. And the greatest proof we have of the truthfulness of Scripture today, the reality of Christ, is all the lives changed from being alienated and enemies of God to being lovers of Christ and desiring to please Him!

You do need to understand the powerful influence of false teachers – vv. 14-15

14 And they had forgotten to take bread, and did not have more than one loaf in the boat with them.

15 And He was giving orders to them, saying, "Watch out! Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod."

They have about a 13-mile, six-hour cruise across the lake, so Jesus seizes the opportunity to do some teaching based on what just happened. We'll come back to that one loaf of bread in verse 14, but just know this, if one of those disciples had been a mother, guaranteed they would not have forgotten to take bread. Men can pretty much only think of one thing at a time – get in the boat. Woman can think ten or more things at a time – get in the boat, be sure we have the lunch pails, are there enough oars, what is the weather like, how long will it take, does anyone need to use the restroom before we set out?

BEWARE AND WATCH OUT (v. 15) Jesus is dead serious in what He wants them to know. Jesus is "giving them orders." These are not a few suggestions they might consider. Oh no, Jesus is ordering them. The church is under orders to teach truth and expose and refute lies. Titus 1:9 says elders must know the Word well enough to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. Paul warned if anyone doesn't preach the same gospel I preached to you, let him be accursed (Galatians 1:8). Those are strong words.

And Jesus' words here couldn't be any stronger, "Watch out and beware!" He uses the figure of leaven to show us how deadly, how powerful and influential false teaching can be, not just to you personally but to the church itself. The Pharisees taught a legalistic, self-righteous, man-centered message and totally rejected the grace of God. Herod and his boys, along with the Sadducees, were the worldly liberals of the day, denying the supernatural and totally absorbed with their power and pleasures.

THE POWER OF LEAVEN Jesus' strong warning reminds us, we are in a war. Not a war of flesh and blood, but in a war of truth vs. lies and evil. He uses leaven or yeast to illustrate how subtle false teaching can be. You just put a little yeast in the dough and the whole lump rises. It's a camel's nose in the tent thing. You allow a little false teaching to come in, maybe a little shift from creation, or marriage, or gender issues, or sovereign grace in salvation, or the inspiration of the Bible, just put a little leaven in there, and slowly the whole thing is under the influence of the yeast. How do churches that started out strong and vigorous for the gospel end up rejecting clear biblical teaching and endorsing theories and positions that are clearly unbiblical?

LEGALISM, LIBERALISM, AND WORLDLINESS Leaven represents unbiblical, anti-biblical, human, religious, and worldly systems that very subtly and quietly make their way into a man's heart or a church's position. The church has been infiltrated by various kinds of leaven ever since the beginning. Paul had to deal with it in Galatia. Leaven turned the church of the middle ages into a Pharisaical institution of salvation by good works. The leaven of Sadducee-type liberalism, unbelief, and apostasy invaded the church in England and America ever since the Enlightenment. Watch out and beware. William Carey, the Father of Modern Missions, took the gospel to India in the early 1800s. A college was founded in his name in Sempore. That school turned away from the faith a long time ago, with faculty now including Hindus. Jonathan Edwards was one of the early presidents of Princeton University. Great and godly theologians taught there in the 1800s. But the leaven of liberalism crept in to the point that today you would have a hard time finding anyone in that institution who believes the Bible is the inerrant word of God. Jesus couldn't be stronger. Watch and beware! Fight the good fight of faith.

You need to understand exactly who Christ is and what He is capable of doing – vv. 16-21

16 They began to discuss with one another the fact that they had no bread. 17 And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart? 18 "HAVING EYES, DO YOU NOT SEE? AND HAVING EARS, DO YOU NOT HEAR? And do you not remember, 19 when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces you picked up?" They said to Him, "Twelve." 20 "When I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up?" And they said to Him, "Seven." 21 And He was saying to them, "Do you not yet understand?"

DULLARDS AND FORGETTERS First, remember who is doing the teaching and to whom He is teaching? We're talking about the God-Man teaching us dummkopf sinners. How patient He was, and is, even though at times He lets us know, He's getting a little ticked with our dullness and slowness to get it. Hebrews 5:12 hits us straight on, "You've become dull of hearing. By now you ought to be teachers, but you are so slow, we've got to come back and teach you the basics. You need milk and not solid food." What about you? Are you guilty of being dull and slow to grasp God's truth?

So these disciples are all obsessed with having only one little loaf of bread! They had a pretty vigorous discussion about it. How long does it take to talk about one loaf of bread? "We only have one loaf of bread! Well we had seven bins left over. What happened to it? Who was supposed to pick it up? Not me." On and on they talked about having no bread except this measly one loaf. Boy, doesn't that sound like us? We're trying to have a Bible study and we're all about who forgot to make the coffee! And then when Jesus talks about leaven, they think He's also talking about bread! They missed His whole point.

How easy to sit in church while the guy is preaching away and all you're thinking about is the bread. What are we doing for lunch? Your mind runs through your frig trying to remember if there's any milk left. We need a new roof. Do we have enough diapers until Monday or do we need to stop at Wal-Mart? When did I have the oil changed last? All caught up in a loaf of bread!

A DIVINE DRESSING DOWN (v. 17-20) Guess who knows exactly what they, and we, are thinking? Verse 17 is so good, "Jesus, aware of this." So we're in for a bit of a divine dressing down, people. Sometimes your boss may dress you down, but his goal is to lift you up. Here Jesus gives them a what for in their spiritual dullness, but He loves them. They are His men. This is the church in embryo. We can't be all caught up in bread loaves and miss God's big picture for your life!

So Jesus fires out nine questions to them, one right after another! This reminds me of the only way to get a mule's attention is by a 2x4 between the eyes. He charges them with missing the whole point. He is patient, but firm. Maybe a little ticked. And just like us, they just don't get it. These guys are believers, but they remind us that new believers don't know everything, and even for more mature believers, there's more ignorance in our hearts than we are aware of. 1 Cor. 8:2-3 keeps us humble, "If anyone supposes that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know; but if anyone loves God, he is known by Him."

UNDERSTAND THESE THINGS (v. 21) What did they not yet understand? Who He is and what He is capable of doing. They didn't remember how He multiplied those loaves and fishes with plenty left over. And they just don't understand Who He really is! Our hearts are slow, like molasses in minus 20 degree weather. If we'd think carefully about our Christian faith, about Christ, the Bible, creation, salvation, if we really took the time to meditate, we should be wowed and dazzled. We wouldn't be all about one measly loaf of bread.

And we should be grasping something of His power in our lives. Not only can He multiply bread like crazy, but He is able to do exceedingly abundantly beyond all that we can ask or think! Paul said "I can do all things through Christ who infuses His power into me!" He reminds us in Colossians 1:27 that the great mystery of the gospel is "Christ in you, the hope of glory!" Do you understand that as a believer, Christ is in you not only working powerfully through you and able to save you, but also working powerfully and able to deliver you from your anger and addiction and bitterness and lust? He is able to transform you from every kind and category of sin to pursuing a life of godliness and holiness.

That's what you need to understand! Not that you only have one loaf of bread, but that you have the loving, compassionate, powerful Son of God working for you, teaching you. Listen up and understand! Get your spiritual ears and eyes open to Christ. Beware of the leaven of legalism, liberalism, and worldliness which can all destroy you. Get a growing grip on what it really means to be a Christian and what it really means to know Christ personally and live in His power.