

Easter -THEY DIDN'T UNDERSTAND

Luke 18:31-18:34

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The ability to make intelligent and correct decisions is one of the great secrets of successful Christian living.

ILLUSTRATION: Even if you aren't a sports fan, I think you'll appreciate this story about a college football team whose starting quarterback had just been injured. Their #2 quarterback was sick, and hadn't even dressed for the game. All the coach had left was a 3rd-string freshman who had been a quarterback in high school, but who was just being used on the college team as a punter.

To make matters worse, they were backed up on their own 3-yard line. It was a desperate situation, and the coach's only thought was somehow to get a little farther from their goal line to give them room to punt out of danger.

Sending in the 3rd-string quarterback, the coach said, "Son, I want you to hand off to the big fullback Kowaski for the next two plays, let him run right into the middle of the line and get us a few yards of breathing room. Then I want you to punt."



The young quarterback did as he was instructed. On the first play he handed off to Kowaski, but almost miraculously Kowaski found a hole off tackle and ran for 50 yards. The young quarterback called the same play again, and once more, miracle of miracles, the hole opened again and Kowaski gained another 45 yards. The fans went crazy. In two plays they had gone 95 yards, and the ball was on their opponent's 2-yard line. It was first down and goal to go!

Confidently the team lined up once again. The young quarterback received the snap, stepped back and to everyone's amazement, punted the ball into the end zone. As his stunned teammates came off the field, the coach angrily grabbed the young quarterback and demanded, "What in the world were you thinking about when you called that last play?" The quarterback answered, "I was thinking what a dumb coach we have." *Illustration by M. Newland*

SUMMARY: Now that story sounds ridiculous, but the truth of the matter is that many college and professional coaches today do not expect their quarterbacks to make decisions. They send all the plays in from the bench.

APPLICATION: Now obviously we are not here this morning to talk football. But there is an important point we need to see here about our relationship with God. God has paid us the ultimate compliment. He allows us to make our own decisions. He allows us to call our own plays.

When He created us in His own image, this was primary among the characteristics with which He endowed us - the ability to understand, to reason, and to choose.

With this in mind, please turn to [Luke 18:31-33](#) and listen as I read. **"Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, 'We are going up to Jerusalem and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock Him, insult Him, spit on Him, flog Him and kill Him. On the third day He will rise again.'"**

Stop for a moment and think about what I have just read. Then answer this question, "Did you understand what I read?" Did you understand those words?

I expect you to answer, "Yes, I understood them." After all, they are pretty simple words. We do understand words like "mock, insult, spit, flog, kill," and "rise again." We understand very well what Jesus was saying.

The apostle Paul once said, **"I preach unto you Christ crucified. Unto the Jews that is a stumbling block. Unto the Greeks it is foolishness. But to those who are saved it is the power of God and the wisdom of God."** You see, the old rugged cross is the very heart of the message about Jesus.

That is why Jesus took His apostles aside and said, **"I have something important to tell you. We're going to Jerusalem, and when we get there they are going to turn me over to the Gentiles, who will mock me, insult me, spit on me, flog me, and kill me. And then on the third day I will rise again."** Now what could be clearer than that?

Jesus didn't tell them that just once, but over and over again. In [Matthew 16, 17, & 20](#) Jesus tells them the same thing just as clearly as He does here.

Now let's go on to [vs. 34](#). "The disciples did not understand any of this. Its meaning was hidden from them, and they did not know what He was talking about." Isn't that an interesting verse of Scripture?

I. WHY DIDN'T THEY UNDERSTAND?

In amazement, we wonder, "What's the matter with them? Were they hard of hearing? Why didn't they get the message? Why didn't they understand?" I think there are a couple of answers to that question.

#1: We all realize that there are some things we learn later on in life that, as we look back, we're amazed that we didn't learn sooner.

We reach a stage in life where we look back and see all the dumb things we have done, and wish that somehow we had known then what we know now. How much better life could have been if we had just learned those lessons earlier?

ILLUSTRATION: My parents probably wondered why I didn't learn from their mistakes. I wonder why my children didn't learn from my mistakes. And someday, I imagine my kids will ask why their children didn't learn from their mistakes.

ILLUSTRATION: Bill Cosby wrote a book on fatherhood in which he suggests that the first parents were not Adam and Eve, but God, and that the first kids were Adam and Eve.

So God puts Adam and Eve into the Garden of Eden, and He has that parental conversation that all parents have with their kids. God tells them, "You have the run of the garden. It is all yours. You can do anything you want, but there is one forbidden fruit, and I don't want you to eat it."

And just like a lot of kids today, Adam and Eve quickly hold up their hands and ask, "Dad, where is this forbidden fruit?" Cosby says that by this time God may have been wishing that He had stopped creating with the elephant. But God answers them, "Well, it is just over there."

And Adam and Eve acted just like kids in every generation have acted; it wasn't long until they were eating the forbidden fruit. Then when God asked, "Why did you do that?" They said the same thing all kids say, "I don't know. I don't know why I did that."

Cosby then makes an amazing and profound suggestion. God said, "You can't live in the garden anymore," and pronounced a curse upon them. It was only then that God told them, "Be fruitful and multiply." And Cosby suggests, "They didn't realize it just then, but kids were a part of the curse." Cosby suggests that God was thinking, "I'll show you what it is like to have kids who eat forbidden fruit. I'm going to give you kids, too."

SUMMARY: In some ways the apostles were just like little kids. Jesus told them what was going to happen, and it didn't sink in. Maybe part of the reason was because they just weren't ready to learn.

#2: There is another answer, though, to explain why they didn't understand.

1 Corinthians 2:8 says, "**None of the rulers of this age understood it, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory.**"

Did you hear that? If the rulers - Gov. Pilate, Caiaphas the High Priest, members of the Sanhedrin, the Roman soldiers - if they had understood who Jesus was, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory.

When Paul refers to the sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross, he calls it a "mystery." And the word "mystery" that he uses is a Greek word for a military strategy that is kept secret from the enemy.

Often time's military strategy depended so much upon secrecy, that even those in positions of command weren't told the secret strategy until the last possible minute, because if the enemy found out, then the plan would fail.

If Satan had found out what was happening, the plan wouldn't have worked. So God kept it secret.

On Calvary's hill, while they're driving nails into the hands of Jesus, while Jesus is writhing in pain and His blood is dripping to the ground. While Jesus is dying, Satan is saying, "I've won. I've beaten God. Evil is triumphant. Righteousness has been defeated." Satan didn't know the plan of God.

It wasn't until 3 days later, when Jesus rose from the tomb, that Satan realized that he had made a mistake. "I played into the plan of God. I did exactly what God expected me to do. I crucified the Lord of Glory, and now sinners can be redeemed and saved from their sins."

Jesus told the apostles ahead of time, but it went right over their heads. They didn't understand.

II. DO WE UNDERSTAND?

Now what about us, today? Do we understand? **I Corinthians 1:18** says. **"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."**

Do you remember the two on the road to Emmaus? When they finally opened their eyes and realized they had been talking with Jesus and that He really was alive and had conquered death, it says that **"their hearts burned within them."**

I think that is what happened to His disciples. After the Resurrection, their eyes were opened. Now all the pieces of the puzzle started to fit together, and these words of Jesus made sense to them. For the first time, they began to understand this teaching that had just gone over their heads before.

It's the same way with us, isn't it? It seems like this "cross" business, and this "dying" business, and this "shed blood" business is foolishness. It's gory. We don't even want to hear about it.

But then the Holy Spirit locks into our hearts, and we begin to realize that this is a personal message, and we confess Jesus as our Savior and become His disciples. Then what used to be foolishness is now wisdom. What used to be weakness is now power and strength. Suddenly, it all makes sense.

Here is power to change the way we think, to change the way we act, to change our lives. Here is power to overcome our sins, to give us victory over alcoholism, or drug abuse.

Here is power to heal marriages that are broken, power to aid the heart torn apart by grief. Here is power to bring families back together again, and to fill chasms of loneliness that are deep inside of us. Here is power greater than anything that the world has ever seen.

It is God's power to change us, to transform us, to make us new, and to give us victory. We don't have to walk around with our tail between our legs anymore. We don't have to walk around defeated by Satan.

God beat him, and Jesus conquered him on Calvary. The strategy came off without a hitch. The victory has been won. Understand that. Never let that go!

III. THERE ARE SOME THINGS WE'LL NEVER UNDERSTAND THIS SIDE OF HEAVEN

Finally, there are some things about His crucifixion that we will never be able to understand this side of heaven.

1. We'll never understand the misery that Jesus experienced on the cross. We do everything we can to prolong life and put off death. We fear the pain of death. We fear the uncertainty of it.

But the Bible says that Jesus died for our sins - every sin that has ever been committed. He has taken all that sin on Himself and He died for that.

I'm weighed down with the burden of my own sin and yet Jesus carried the burden of everybody's sin in every age and every generation. We'll never know the misery that He experienced.

2. We'll never know the loneliness that Jesus experienced as He hung rejected on the cross, dying for our sins.

3. We'll never know what went on in heaven when Jesus died on that cross. Every time we read the words, "**My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?**" we are reading a mystery. How can God forsake Himself? How can an immortal God become mortal and die? How can a spiritual God become flesh and live with us?

I don't know. Nor do you. We will never understand that. We will never understand our redemption. We will never understand what it is to be completely forgiven and cleansed from our sins. But one of these days we'll open our eyes and we'll be in a different place. It will be Resurrection Day and suddenly all of these mysteries will be made clear.

But right now, this we can understand. There is only one sacrifice. There is only one way to forgiveness. There is only one plan of salvation and it is all made possible through Jesus. Jesus Christ died for you and me.

That is all that matters. When He becomes your Savior, then you have all of these promises for yourself. For your faith, your repentance, your willingness to obey in Christian baptism you are promised the forgiveness of sins, and the gift of God's Holy Spirit to empower you to live a Christian life.

Please, please don't ignore the invitation of God today.