



Blackfoot Church of Christ

Published by Blackfoot Church of Christ
Blackfoot, ID

Volume 6 Number 38

September 23, 2018

The Misunderstood Jesus

By Doy Moyer

Understanding people is often difficult. What do they mean? How are they using phrases? Are they being literal or figurative, or both? In person, we can ask and clarify, but when we are reading what others said, we can easily misinterpret because we are not hearing the inflections or seeing their gestures. Great care needs to be taken because, even face to face, misunderstandings are often the cause of divisions, anger, and loss of friendship. How much more ought we to be careful in our understanding of the words of Jesus!

Jesus was often misunderstood. This was true, not only of His enemies but also of His own disciples who, several times, demonstrated that they just weren't getting it. While there can be multiple causes of this, one of the more prominent reasons is because they were taking Jesus too literally. Now I know that might give us pause because we have often been told that we need to "take the Bible literally." This is an unfortunate way of stating this because, at best, it can be misleading. Our goal is to understand the literal meaning of the text, but that literal meaning (i.e., the real point of what's being said) can come through a number of rhetorical devices and figures of speech. Jesus often taught in parables, a mode of teaching that capitalizes on analogies and figures (Matt 13:10-17). Jesus speaks in figures and metaphors on a number of occasions, and this sometimes was met with confusion. This is not to say that Jesus never spoke plainly. He did. Even so, what He taught needed to be attended by discerning ears. Here are some examples among many:

“Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” Jn 2:19

The Jews asked for a sign from Jesus to show His authority in overturning the tables at the temple. Jesus’ response confused them. The Jews then said, “It took forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?” (v. 20) John, however, tells us that Jesus was speaking of His own body in the resurrection. Even so, this misunderstanding was used as a reason at His trials to put Jesus to death (Matt 26:61-62).

“How can a man be born when he is old? He cannot enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born, can he?” Jn 3:4

This was Nicodemus’ question after he had been told that one must be born again to see the kingdom of God (v. 3). Nicodemus was confused, thinking that Jesus was talking about a literal birth. Jesus then explained that this new birth was “of water and the Spirit” (v. 5). He was not literally talking about a physical re-birth, but a spiritual birth.

“He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him” Jn 6:56

Jesus referred to Himself as the bread of life who had come down out of heaven, making the connection between Himself and the manna provided by God for Israel in the wilderness. He then made the bold statement that unless one eats His flesh and drinks His blood, there could be no life. Rather than seeing that Jesus was speaking of His death, His resurrection, and His word (not cannibalism), many were offended and walked away because of its difficulty. On the positive side, one of Peter’s more brilliant moments is here. When Jesus asked if the apostles were going to walk away, too, Peter said, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life...” (v. 68). A misunderstanding of Jesus’ teaching by over-literalizing will wreak havoc in one’s faith.

“Let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one” Lk 22:36

This passage has been a conundrum even for modern believers. The context is that Jesus is telling His disciples that they needed to get ready for what was coming. In particular, they needed to be prepared for His death, then any subsequent persecution that may arise. He reminded them that when He

first sent them out, they lacked nothing. Now they needed to take along a knapsack and sword. Why? “For I tell you that this Scripture must be fulfilled in me: ‘And he was numbered with the transgressors.’ For what is written about me has its fulfillment” (v. 37). Jesus’ given reason here was not about whether they would literally be cared for, but rather that He was about to go to the cross. The import of what Jesus said is that they needed to be prepared like they were going on a difficult journey. This journey, however, would be one that they had not fully anticipated. When the disciples say, “Look, Lord, here are two swords,” Jesus said (literally), “Enough!” They were missing the point. Just a short time later, Peter’s use of the sword showed that he was still missing the point (though Malchus got the point). What Jesus said was not about fighting physically, but about girding up their loins for a spiritual fight to come.

“Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees” Mt 16:6

The disciples had forgotten to bring bread. Jesus used this occasion to warn about the “leaven” of the Pharisees and Sadducees, a figure He was using to refer to their teachings (v. 12). But the disciples did not get it and wondered if this was because they had no bread. Jesus chastised them for this “miss,” saying, “O you of little faith.” Do you not perceive? Do you not remember? There was something about the way they were hearing and thinking that was insufficient for understanding Jesus. Finally, after rebuke, they understood.

These examples should be sufficient to demonstrate that we need to take great care in our efforts to understand the intentions and teachings of Jesus. Jesus often spoke in metaphor, figures, and parable, expecting the disciples to understand. He expects us to understand as well, and we do not do the teachings of Jesus justice if we fail to take into account the ways in which He so often taught. Let’s put on our caps of discernment, then, and go to work!

Prayer Requests & Announcements

- Empey's are traveling and plan to be back later this week. April will have appointments in Boise.
- Brenda has been undergoing medical treatments to improve her health
- Ross & Debbie's grandson is due this week. No later than Thursday afternoon. Debbie will be traveling there this week.
- The Christians in the Philippines.
- Bible class tonight 6:00pm at Chad and Kass' on evangelism
- Next Sunday is our regular scheduled business meeting
- We have CD's of the meeting with Tim McPherson if any would like copies

For prayer requests, call or text

Chad @ (208) 221-2587 or Ross @ (208) 680-6590

Assignments

<u>Today</u> Bible Study – Ross Ward Song Leader – Chad Mitchell Lord's Table – Tom Mitchell Sermon – Ross Ward	<u>Wednesday</u> Bible Study – Chad Mitchell Song Leader – Ben Palmer Invitation – Ross Ward
<u>Next Sunday</u> Bible Study – Ross Ward Song Leader – Tom Mitchell Lord's Table – David Porter Sermon – TBD	<u>Next Wednesday</u> Bible Study – Chad Mitchell Song Leader – David Porter Invitation – Ross Ward

Blackfoot Church of Christ
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Meeting Times:

Sunday Morning Classes 10:00AM
Sunday Morning Worship 11:00AM
Wednesday Evening 7:30PM



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