

I have come to Give Understanding

Proverbs 3:1-12

Psalm 107:17-22

Mark 8:1-21

Mark 8:15 (ESV) "And he cautioned them, saying, "Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod."

Proverbs 3:1-12 (ESV) "My son..Let not ... love and faithfulness forsake you...Trust in the Lord with all your heart...Be not wise in your own eyes...do not despise the Lord's discipline..."

1. Introduction

a) 1949. Two saintly women, together with others, prayed earnestly for God to visit the Isle of Lewis in the Scottish Hebrides. Duncan Campbell, from Edinburgh, was invited as a visiting missionary, but he was frustrated - the congregation were content in their stiff, cold, dead, routines - traditions.

What could he do? He noticed a young lad near the front, recently come to Christ, baptised in Holy Spirit, weeping quietly, a pool of tears around his farmer's boots. Campbell, in humility, stopped preaching - asked the lad to pray.

As the boy prayed, the power of God, the Holy Spirit, fell upon those dour Scottish churchgoers, who also began crying out for mercy to God. Half stood, arms outstretched, transfixed in God's Glory - for two hours. The other half slumped to the floor - calling on the Lord in repentance. But there was more, for the Spirit of God that night, swept through a village seven miles away, and practically every household in that village, had someone brought to the Lord. **Now, that is revival!**

It began small in 1949 - two housebound sisters in their eighties, one blind, the other crippled with arthritis, waging a prayer campaign that delighted Heaven and defeated Hell. This revival lasted for some years and spread to many islands in the

outer Hebrides! They spoke and sang in Gaelic, and many, walking home on chilly evenings testified, to hearing the sounds of heaven!

b) Revival intensifies presence - of the Holy Spirit, faith is deepened, God is glorified, worship and praise abounds, for who He is, and what He has done, from creation to Cross, leading into a deeper apprehension that God is real - Jesus is “the way, the truth and the life”. (Alleluia!) God in Christ, therefore, is not **something**, but **someone** to relate to, to experience, to know with the heart, not simply to know about - a world of difference.

This is why the Bible talks about “covenant”, a word of deep meaning, but one which we should get our head around. in our relationship with God. A “covenant” is a **personal relationship** in which two parties, make binding promises to each other, voluntarily. The closest parallel we have is “marriage”, where a man and woman choose to enter into relationship, make promises, and in doing so, Biblically, become one - unity, complete. This is why the Bible talks about us as being made in God’s image - in covenant, can be, we are one with Him. But we can also be separated from Him, and that is what we call “sin”.

The word “covenant” reminds us of those covenants made with Abraham and Moses. Jeremiah prophesied: “Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a **new** covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah...” We hear this prophecy, now fulfilled, every time we come to Holy Communion - “this is my blood of the new covenant” - the sacrificial blood of Jesus on the cross, thus establishing this new covenant between God, and those who enter into the covenant - commit, follow Jesus, embraced in His love.

As Jesus fed the 5000 and now the 4000. within a mixed crowd of Jews and Gentiles this time, in the Decapolis, replicated in the Last Supper, we find a similar pattern: “he **took** the seven loaves, and having given thanks (or **blessed**), he **broke** them and **gave** them to his disciples to **set before** the people....” thus establishing the covenant principle for all peoples who come in faith to Jesus:

- Jesus is taken captive,
- Blessed, in doing the Father’s will,.. “not my will, but yours, be done.”

- Broken, physically, spiritually, on that cross of shame “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
- He gave Himself for the world His ministry complete; “into your hands I commit my spirit”.

Would the 4000 have said “thank you”? Of course! and that is why we can call Communion the “Eucharist”, which means “thank you”. Thank you for this new covenant, thank you for this new relationship with Jesus, with one another, Jew and Gentile, united in Christ. When visiting a Greek market place today, you hear the word all around you - εὐχαριστεω! Thank you! And from our Psalm today:

“Let them thank the LORD for his steadfast love,
for his wondrous works to the children of man!”

This, then, is the pattern, the model, of being a disciple of Jesus. Christ takes us, He blesses us, breaks us (of our selfish stubbornness), and gives us, not only to be His disciples, but equips us to use the ministry He has given us - to share, to give out, to trust Him, to depend upon Him!

2. Do we Get it?

a) But the big question in Mark at this point, is “did they get it”? Did the disciples get it? Did the Pharisees get it? Do we get it? About the Pharisees Jesus “sighed deeply in his spirit and said, “Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation.”“ But the Pharisees have seen, do know about, have been surrounded with, signs. Are they, are we, blind, deaf, or just hypocritical, denying the truth! Is this why Jesus says He will not give them a sign? If He does they will still dispute it, claim it as something else, reject it, even claiming it to be of the enemy! Stiff-necked!

Is it not the same today? Countless people claim to be non-believers seeking concrete proof for the claims of Jesus. That position is sheer nonsense! Can they proof God does **not** exist? Once it was said “all swans are white” - suddenly WA pops up - black swans! Science cannot be absolute - there is always more. Humankind, can not save the world! All of us are people of faith, exercising faith in all we do - getting up, driving, flying, sitting on a chair, turning on a light switch! No wonder Jesus “sighed” (an

inward groan) at stubbornness, - closed minds, pigheadedness! As Hebrews puts it: "For good news came to us just as to them (both Jews and Gentiles), but the message they heard did not benefit them, because **they were not united by faith with those who listened.**" Are we the same? Do we filter out the reality of God because of **our** perceptions, **our** takes, having deaf ears, blind to the 'signs' of Jesus' kingdom and presence?

b) Jesus cautioned the disciples "Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." "They had forgotten to bring bread - were anxious at not having food. No wonder Jesus rebukes them, for their focus was on how they could fix the problem, despite the 5000, 4000. "Are your hearts hardened?" "After all that you have witnessed, shared in, you still do not trust me!" says Jesus. This is very strong stuff, for Jesus is quoting Jeremiah: "Hear this, O foolish and senseless people, who have eyes, but see not, who have ears, but hear not." Is each individual, are you, the criterion of truth, determining what is truth? God is bigger than your mind, my mind!

b) Then Jesus speaks of 'leaven'. yeast, warning the disciples not about quality of bread, but **putting them on guard against the wrong sort of kingdom-vision and missing it!** The Pharisees, stuck in their vision to oust the Romans, have a Jewish kingdom, to observe the law with great strictness - very narrow compared with what Jesus had in mind. Herod's vision was self-centred - to be the true King of Israel! Jesus will have none of it - such visions are paltry compared with the Kingdom of God! The disciples must see this. We must see it! Don't avoid it - be diverted into escapism! Are the disciples, are we ready for a new life of dependence and faith in Jesus the Messiah? As one writer puts it: "What makes **your** dough rise?" Is it the leaven of the risen Lord, or the leaven of this world?. This has, throughout history, often been the choice that the church has needed to make - the city of God or the city of this world, as St Augustine of Hippo put it - and sadly we have failed to our shame in presenting the alternative to this world!!

Over and over again, prophets such as Elijah and Isaiah put before Israel three essential questions:

- Who do **you** Worship? (God or the gods, an idol?)

- In **whom** or what do you trust? (In God or in what the world can offer, perhaps military power?) And
- how are **you** to serve God in these times? (Through power and bluster or through trust in God's faithfulness?)

Where does our trust, our, foundation in life, lie? From Proverbs: “Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your **own** understanding.” And “My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the LORD reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.”

3. Revival

a) Chesterton said: “At least five times (within the Christian era) the Faith has, to all appearance, gone to the dogs. In each of these five cases it was the dog that died..” A reference to times when the church was in a seemingly hopeless position - persecution under the Roman Empire - chaos in the Dark Ages - church corruption in the Middle Ages - the humanist sceptics of the 18th century, and today people still negatively react post Darwin - the no-god secularists are taking over, undermining Christianity, replacing it with a :me-too”, self-centred, “doing it my way” stance. This is the “leaven of the Pharisees”, the shutting down of truth, reality - denying the world of the spirit, and escaping, through diversion, into the world of fantasy, of many - sheer escapism. In the past, having “gone to the dogs”, the dog died, and so it will again. But for us, we are being called to stand “firm in the faith”.

Mark is showing us how Jesus has dealt with such a situation - when the disciples do not get it, the people do not get it, do not see, even want to see, what Jesus the Lord is all about - “Are your hearts hardened”? And if you do not get it, you have lost the plot.

b) This is why we have to pray for a Kingdom Revival. A personal description of that Lewis Revival. “As we approached the church, there seemed to be an aura around the whole area. Conversation died as people eased themselves into their seats in silence. The church was packed with young and old. When the people sang, oh, the shivers chased themselves up and down my spine. I had never heard singing like this. They sang...from their hearts. The words rose to heaven in a power that could only be sensed but not described. The singing was fire! It went right through you.”

Does the Church, do we, and all the saints of God, need:

- a fresh vision of God's glory, and of what Jesus was on about, so that we, and many others, **do** get it,
- a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit not only to convict us of our sin, but also the sin of the Church,
- to be humbled, broken, afresh, moving us into powerful prayer - corporately and on our own,
- to have a deeper hunger for God's truth? and to
- operate in the power of the Holy Spirit's so that the Lord's works of the Kingdom will be accomplished.

Then our hearts will overflow with thanksgiving - εὐχαριστεω!

Come Lord Jesus. come in the power of your Holy Spirit!

Lord of the years, sovereign over time and history, speak to us in power by your Word and Spirit; break into the short-sightedness and errors of our understanding. Help us to distinguish the true from the false, the enduring from the passing, and the costly from the cheap. Grant us the courage to be faithful rather than fashionable, and turn our eyes from the quicksand of nostalgia and the mirage of an imaginary future. Give to us such a clear understanding of the times in which we live that we may serve your purposes in our generation and be more truly your people in our world today. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

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Have thine own way, Lord, Have Thine own way;

Thou art the Potter, I am the clay.

Mould me and make me, After Thy will,

While I am waiting, Yielded and still.