



DO YOU STILL NOT UNDERSTAND?

~ MARK 8:17 ~

PASTOR COLIN RIEKE ~ JUNE 23, 2013

The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat. "Be careful," Jesus warned them. "Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod." They discussed this with one another and said, "It is because we have no bread." Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: "Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" "Twelve," they replied. "And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" They answered, "Seven." He said to them, "Do you still not understand?"



This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it,

"I don't understand women." I mean, what is the big deal about leaving the toilet seat up? What is the big deal about brushing off and eating that sandwich which fell on the floor? What's the big deal about throwing your sweaty workout clothes in the dryer to dry them? Now maybe some of the men in the room here can relate to my conundrum. But I also think the women in this room would have their own list of things which they don't understand about men. Vast numbers of books have been written about the differences between men and women, some of them are actually quite humorous. They are funny because there is a difference between men and women, and the sooner you come to that realization, the easier your life could be.

The difference between men and women is just one example of something I don't totally understand. But that is certainly not the only thing I don't understand, and that's OK. I have come to that realization that I may not understand everything, and I don't have to pretend to understand everything either. One of my many favorite sayings is, "better to keep your mouth shut and let people think you are a fool, than to open your mouth and remove all doubt." Sometimes I find the people who open their mouth really don't understand what they are talking about. And while this may not be all that harmful in many instances, it can become a major problem if you don't understand God and Jesus. This is something that the disciples were certainly guilty of on more than one occasion, and we would be fools to think that this could never happen to us. So, what is understanding?

(1)

Take a moment and think how you would finish this phrase, UNDERSTANDING IS _____. Is understanding knowing something? Is it about how you respond to that knowledge? Or is it something else? We continue our look at questions Jesus asked during his ministry here on earth, and really the gist of this question is, "How dumb are you?" or "Don't you understand?" Now what is it that led Jesus to say

these words to his disciples, and these words to us? Jesus had actually performed one of his great miracles. He had just fed four thousand people with just seven loaves of bread. (This was a different occasion than when he fed five thousand with five loaves and two fish) And like the previous occasion the disciples were asked to pick up the leftovers. They had more left over than when they started.

Immediately following this the Pharisees, that holier-than-thought religious group, approached Jesus asking him for a miracle to prove that he was who he said he was. Jesus refused to give them a sign, and instead went into the boat with his disciples and they crossed the Sea of Galilee. When he was alone with his disciples he told them, **“Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod.”** The disciples discussed what Jesus meant when he said this. And they thought he was chastising them for not bringing enough food onto the boat. Jesus didn’t want them to take any bread from the Pharisees. “How dumb are you?” Jesus said.

OK, so just didn’t quite say it as point blank as that, but he came pretty close. **“Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts still hardened?”** How could the disciples think Jesus was talking about literal, physical bread? They had been with Jesus for a while now, they had seen the miracles he did by producing bread out of scant morsels. Why would Jesus tell the disciples to not take bread from the Pharisees when he could have easily provided more bread for them at a moment’s notice? Do you still not understand what Jesus was talking about? The gospel writer Luke tells us what Jesus meant when he told the disciples to be wary of the Pharisees, **“Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.”**

Maybe you’ve heard this before, but the word hypocrite had its origins in Greek theater. The actors would wear masks and play different characters on stage. A hypocrite is someone who wears a mask, who hides who he truly is. This may be OK on stage for actors, but in real life it takes on a different connotation. The Pharisees were hiding their true intentions when they were asking Jesus for a miracle. They really didn’t want to believe that Jesus was God’s Messiah. Jesus was warning against hypocrisy. But the disciples didn’t get it, they didn’t understand.

It is so easy for us to look down our long noses at the disciples, wondering how they couldn’t get it. It seems so simple. Jesus was not there to just fulfill their every physical desire, but to do God’s will, to be a Savior for our sins. UNDERSTANDING IS easy, just read your Bible, like you heard about last week, listen to it, learn from it, put two and two together. Oh, if understanding was that easy. If understanding were just knowing the Bible backwards and forwards, inside and out.

Understanding the Bible this way leads us to realize one sobering fact. We are sinners. But not just that we are sinners, but that we are condemned and damned sinners. Sinners deserving the everlasting flames of hell for what we have done. Sinners who can do nothing but curse the loving God who created us. Is it no wonder then that there are so many who do not understand? Is it any wonder then that so many stubbornly refuse to hear, so many who have hardened their hearts? UNDERSTANDING like this IS impossible!

(2)

It can be easy for us to look down our noses at the disciples, but it could be just as easy for them to look down their noses at us. We have God’s Word before us, many times we can pull it up on our tablets or phones at the touch of a button. We have the freedom to worship and all the opportunities to hear

God's Word, and we so often avoid it. We find time for piano recitals, golf outings and sporting events, but how hard is it to carve out five minutes to spend with God in his Word? How can we not understand? UNDERSTANDING IS not about what we know or could do. UNDERSTANDING IS about God.

That's why maybe a nice way that I can remember what it means to understand God is to flip the word "understand" around to "stand under." And what exactly am I standing under? As Christians, there really is only one thing to stand under, and that is Christ; to stand under his truth. Standing under means I'm not number one, it means life is not all about me, it means I sometimes have to just suck it up if I think God is wrong. If I stand under an umbrella I am shielded from the sun or the rain, if I stand under Christ, I am shielded not only from the damaging rays of the devil, but also from the wrath of God against sinners.

UNDERSTANDING IS STANDING UNDER. Standing under something may not always be the easiest thing to do. But standing under Christ is the only way we can live as Christians. We see two passages in the Bible that lead us to realize that understanding is not something we can do on our own. Hebrews 11 says, **"By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command,"** and also in Luke 24, **"Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures."** Understanding is not just us choosing to stand under Christ, but that Christ chooses to stand over us.

Christ chose to stand over us when he came down from heaven to fulfill God's perfect law for us. He chose to stand over us when he went to the cross willing to take away the punishment for all of our sins. He chose to stand over us when no one else would. And it is Christ who is still standing over you when nothing seems to be working in your life, it is Christ who is standing over you when your marriage or career is on the rocks, when the economy and your retirement is in the toilet. Christ is standing over you, and he doesn't need to prove it with a miracle.

We continue to stand under Christ when we follow his Word – putting our own ambitions and interpretations aside, we continue to stand under Christ when we are torn down by the law and built up by the gospel. We stand under Christ when we remember what is most important – his life lived for us, and not our life lived for him. We stand under Christ when we live his Word in our lives. We stand under Christ because then we stand under truth. We stand under Christ only by his grace and not because there is anything special in us.

Even though the disciples were so slow to understand, Jesus continued to have patience with them. He did not call them to be disciples because they were the best and the brightest, but because he wanted them. So Jesus does not call us because we are the brightest or the best, but because he wants us. He does not call the equipped, but he equips the called. We see this in countless places in Scripture and throughout history.

I may never be able to understand women, and women may never be able to understand men, but that's OK. I just have to listen to my wife when she wants me to help her with something. And in some ways that is similar to our relationship with Christ. We may not always understand certain things in God's Word, we may not understand certain things that happen in this world. But understanding is to stand under Christ. And we stand under Christ in love, and we stand under Christ in truth. Amen!