

“A Lack of Understanding”
Mark 9:30-32
(Preached at Trinity, August 15, 2012)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In **Chapter 9** we've witnessed the glorious transfiguration of Christ. Peter, James, and John saw Jesus transfigured in the brightness of His glory. And then they descended from the mountain top and we saw the great contrast between the glory on top of the mount of transfiguration and the shame and confusion below. After the multitudes departed Jesus and His disciples were once again alone and Jesus again began to teach them. He always teaches His own people particularly.
 - A. He taught them of the necessity of an absolute abiding trust in God and the necessity of prayer – Verse 28
 - B. I closed last time by stressing that faith demands an eternal, redemptive focus. As long as our hearts and minds are bound by this present age we will always gravitate towards selfishness. Faith demands an eye towards God's eternal, redemptive purpose.
 - C. In the verses before us tonight I want to look more particularly at the understanding of the disciples. Jesus spoke with His disciples privately and taught them of His approaching death which was soon to occur.
2. This is the third consecutive time that our Lord revealed to His disciples His approaching death.

The first:
Mark 8:31 NAU - "And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again."

The second:
Mark 9:9-10 NAU - "As they were coming down from the mountain, He gave them orders not to relate to anyone what they had seen, until the Son of Man rose from the dead. ¹⁰ They seized upon that statement, discussing with one another what rising from the dead meant."
3. In spite of repeated teaching the disciples still did not understand the teaching of Christ. As we consider the failure of the disciples to understand we need to consider this question: Why is there still so much difference in the understanding of Christians today. There are many differences in theology that cause much division in the body of Christ. Some of the disagreements are minor, some are major. Should we concern ourselves with such division in the church of Christ?

4. Some have chosen to solve the problem by simply dismissing doctrinal distinctives. They claim that doctrine divides and that it is far more important to seek love and peace. And so they develop a non-doctrinal mentality. This assures unity.
- a. But unity in the Bible is always grounded upon truth.

Ephesians 4:11-13 NAU - "And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ."

Acts 2:42 KJV - "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."
 - b. R.C. Sproul – "If Christian unity is to mean anything, it must be a unity of faith grounded in the truth. To sacrifice conviction for "peace" is to have no conviction at all."
 English Reformer Hugh Latimer - "We ought never to regard unity so much that we would or should forsake God's Word for her sake."
6. We know a couple things to be true:
- A. We know that God wants us to be united.

1 Corinthians 1:10 NAU - "Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be made complete in the same mind and in the same judgment."
 - B. We know that doctrine is important.

Titus 1:7-9 NAU - "For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, ⁸ but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, ⁹ holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict."

"The teaching" - τὴν διδαχὴν – definite article

Titus 2:1 NAU - "But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine."
7. If doctrine is so important to our Lord's church why is it the church of Christ suffers from so much disunity of doctrine?
- I. Because God has not been pleased to reveal all truth equally to all men
 - A. Jesus taught His disciples particularly
 1. He often took them aside and taught them privately

Mark 9:30-31 NAU - "From there they went out and *began* to go through Galilee, and He did not want anyone to know about it. ³¹
For He was teaching His disciples "
 2. He revealed things to them what He did not reveal to others

Mark 4:10-11 NAU - "As soon as He was alone, His followers, along with the twelve, *began* asking Him *about* the parables. ¹¹ And He was saying to them, "To you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but those who are outside get everything in parables,"

- B. Christians gain knowledge gradually
1. Over and over the NT speaks of growth & maturity
1 Corinthians 3:1 NAS - "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ."
1 Peter 2:2 NAS - "like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,"
 2. As Christians we must apply ourselves diligently to growing in our understanding of the truth
- C. We come to an understanding of the truth in two ways
1. Through revelation – by revelation I mean the Word of God
 - a. There is no new revelation today. God has completed His Word.
 - b. We are to read it continually. We are to study it diligently
Acts 17:10-11 NAU - "The brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea, and when they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. ¹¹ Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily *to see whether these things were so.*"
 - c. The Bible is perspicuous, understandable. But every chapter is not equally understandable.
 LBC - "All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all"
 The Bible has spiritual realities that demand spiritual understanding
1 Corinthians 2:14 ESV - "The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned."
 2. Through illumination
 - a. Ultimately all knowledge comes from God
 Why aren't we still traveling with horse and buggy
 Where did we get the knowledge for space travel
 Where did we get the knowledge for open heart surgery
 - b. There is no higher knowledge than God. He is transcendent and incomprehensible. He can only be known as He makes Himself known. He reveals Himself through His Word and then reveals His Word through inward illumination.
 - c. God opens our understanding to properly understand His Word
Matthew 16:17 NAU - "And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Barjona, because flesh and blood did not reveal *this* to you, but My Father who is in heaven."
2 Timothy 2:7 NAU - "Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything."

3. But God doesn't give us all knowledge as once. And He doesn't give every believer equal understanding.
 Perspicuity does not rule out the need for pastors and teachers
Ephesians 4:13 NAU - "until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ."
Acts 8:30-31 NAU - "Philip ran up and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet, and said, "Do you understand what you are reading?"
³¹ And he said, "Well, how could I, unless someone guides me?"
 And he invited Philip to come up and sit with him."
Luke 24:32 NAU - "They said to one another, "Were not our hearts burning within us while He was speaking to us on the road, while He was explaining the Scriptures to us?"
4. It wasn't until after the resurrection that the Apostles understood and it came as the result of illumination
Luke 24:44-47 NAU - "Now He said to them, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled."
⁴⁵ Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,
⁴⁶ and He said to them, "Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day,
⁴⁷ and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem."
5. We are utterly dependent upon God for divine instruction. It is one of His graces. Do you pray for divine instruction?
 Do you prepare yourself for coming to worship and for hearing the Word of truth?

II. Because we overlay our preconceived ideas upon Scripture

- A. Scripture is perspicuous and plain but it must be read with a careful exegesis
 1. Exegesis: ἐξήγησις – It means to guide from. The key is the preposition meaning “from” – We study gaining our understanding “from out of” the Scriptures.
 2. The opposite of Exegesis is Eisegesis – from the Greek preposition meaning “into”
 In other words reading into the text instead of out from the text resulting in the interpreter's own bias being reflected.
- B. This was one of the problems with the understanding of the Disciples
 1. The word was clear:
Mark 9:7 NAU - "and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is My beloved Son, listen to Him!"
Mark 9:9 NAU - "He gave them orders not to relate to anyone what they had seen, until the Son of Man rose from the dead."
Mark 9:10 NAU - "They seized upon that statement, discussing with one another what rising from the dead meant."
 “Discussing” - συζητέω – argue or debate

2. Their own interpretation of the Messiah just didn't fit what Jesus was saying.
Mark 9:11 NAU - "*Why is it* that the scribes say that Elijah must come first?"
Mark 8:32 NAU - "And He was stating the matter plainly. And Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him."
 3. This is often the problem with our interpretations
 If you approach the Scriptures with a particular eschatology will you be able to see anything else?
- C. We must allow the Bible to instruct us
1. We must follow the rules of hermeneutics
 2. We must study it diligently
 3. Much of our failure to understand the Bible is simply due to our carelessness in handling the Scriptures.

III. Because of our sinful hardness of heart

- A. The fall and sin has left man incapable of understanding God
1. Because of sin we sometimes resist the truth
 2. Notice our text:
Mark 9:31-32 NAU - "For He was teaching His disciples and telling them, "The Son of Man is to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill Him; and when He has been killed, He will rise three days later." But they did not understand *this* statement, and they were afraid to ask Him."
 3. The parallel passage in Luke is even more pointed
Luke 9:43-45 NAU - "And they were all amazed at the greatness of God. But while everyone was marveling at all that He was doing, He said to His disciples, ⁴⁴ "Let these words sink into your ears; for the Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men." ⁴⁵ But they did not understand this statement, and it was concealed from them so that they would not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask Him about this statement."
 - a. What Jesus was saying wasn't unclear. He would be killed and then he will rise in three days.
 - b. This was now the third time in probably the space of a week that he had taught this to them. They knew the meaning but didn't want to receive it.
 - c. This is why they were afraid to ask again. They knew what the answer would be.
 4. Jesus earlier equated their lack of understanding with hardness of heart
Mark 8:15-17 NAU - "And He was giving orders to them, saying, "Watch out! Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." 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?"

- B. People sometimes fail to see the truth of Scripture because they don't want to see it.
 - 1. When we resist the truth our hearts become hardened towards it. In the Luke passage: concealed from them because they would not receive it.
 - 2. It was hid from them because of their own unbelief
 - 3. Our preconceived notions of how we think things should be often blind us to the truth

Conclusion:

- 1. On one hand, we'll never have absolute conformity of belief in the Christian church. God isn't pleased to reveal all truth to His people. This should humble us.
- 2. On the other hand, much of our failure to discern the truth is due to our own sinful approach to the Word of God.
 - a. We are negligent in our study
 - b. We approach the Bible with preconceived ideas
 - c. We harden our hearts to the truth because we don't want to be conformed to the truth.
- 3. Pray that God will protect you from your own hardness of heart.