

## **They Just Don't Get It!**

Turn with me once again to **Mark 6:45** and I want to walk through this passage of Scripture this morning and make some simple observations. Jesus has just fed the 5,000 with five loaves and two small fish and the disciples gathered up twelve baskets full of broken pieces of bread and fish. Quite a miracle. In the story that follows and in the events of chapter seven, the only response I can come up with is that they simply just don't get it! The disciples and the Pharisees, neither of them get it. And I guess my concern is that we probably don't get it either. We miss the point far too often. So let's see what we can observe and what we can learn this morning.

V45 - Notice it says Jesus made his disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him. We aren't quite sure why he had to make them. I assume they wanted to stay with him but he needed to be alone for a while to pray. After dealing with the crowds and with the disciples who themselves weren't getting it, Jesus needed some alone time I'm sure.

It says he constrained them. He told them to go get in the boat. We've watered down Jesus and the gospels. We've made everything about our choice. We've implied that "Jesus just wants us to be happy and contented and satisfied. He won't ask us to do anything we don't want to do." Don't count on it. Not everything Jesus asks us to do will be easy or pleasant or even something we want to do, but it isn't all about pleasing us. Jesus didn't die on the cross so we could be happy, he died on the cross so our sins could be forgiven and we could have eternal life. It's about new life in Christ and it's about becoming like him. That process involves a crucifixion. That's why he told us to take up our cross and follow him. Sometimes that process requires doing some stuff in the short term we don't like, going some places we didn't expect to go, but in the end, it is the road to purpose, to fulfillment, to victory, to ultimate joy and righteousness and peace and to life eternal.

V46 - Jesus went to pray. Always the model and example for us. If Jesus needed to spend time in prayer alone, how much more should we be spending time in prayer. (I wonder if somewhere in the first part of his prayer he didn't say, "Father, I didn't think they would ever leave. Finally, alone with you in prayer.")

V47-51 - Jesus saw them struggling because a strong wind had come up against them. Obeying the Lord doesn't mean you will be unopposed. The winds will often be against you.

Doing the right thing and obeying the Lord can be difficult at times. It's up hill at times. But regardless of the battles we have to fight or the storms and wind we encounter, we are not lost to Jesus. I love the fact that even though they were in the middle of the Sea of Galilee and Jesus was on land, even though it was at night, Jesus could see them struggling. He knew where they were and what was going on. He knows the same about you today. He knows the struggle you are in. He knows how hard you've been rowing against the wind. He sees you. He knows where you are. You don't know it, just like the disciples didn't know it, but Jesus is coming to you. He is walking on the water to you.

The bible says he was about to pass them by. We don't know the reason for that. Was he just trying to slip past them so he wouldn't have to deal with them? You know, like you do in Walmart when you are in a hurry and you see that neighbor that you know will talk for thirty minutes and you try to just slip down another aisle and act like you didn't see her and hope she didn't notice you.

Or perhaps he was going to surprise them by being on the other side when they arrived. Or maybe he was going to just come up beside them and yell "surprise". Of course, none of that makes sense. So what does this mean that he was about to pass by? Maybe none of those explanations make any sense because the context is somewhat extraordinary. No mortal walks on water. When we hear the phrase that someone was going to pass by, we think in terms of them walking or driving past us. But when the phrase is used in context with God, in an extraordinary context, maybe it speaks of something else. It suggests an epiphany, a revelation to us.

Think for a moment. Where have you heard that phrase before in the bible? "To pass by." How about in Exodus 33 and 34? Remember the meeting and the conversation between God and Moses? Turn to **Exodus 33:12** and look at this amazing story. (Exodus 33:12-34:11)

God passed by Moses and it wasn't a bad thing. He caused his glory, the revelation of himself, his nature, his character, his splendor, his power, his essence to pass by Moses. He wasn't trying to hide from Moses or to slip past him, he passed by him in the sense of making himself in all his power and glory known to Moses. It was a revelation of God to Moses.

A similar thing happens in 1 Kings 19 when Elijah is depressed and despairing of his life after running away from Jezebel. The Lord tells him to stand on the mountain because the Lord

is about to pass by. That revelation changed Elijah's life and lifted his depression and despair.

What if in the midst of the struggle Jesus was preparing to pass by them in the sense of revealing himself in his power and glory to the disciples. No mortal man can walk on the sea, in the wind and in the storm. No mortal man can do these things. It was a revelation. "Settle it in your minds and spirits boys, Jesus is God in flesh appearing. Jesus in his incarnate glory is about to pass by you."

Keep your place there in Exodus 33, but look back at Mark 6:52. **"They were completely amazed, for they had not understood about the loaves; their hearts were hardened."** They just don't get it. Jesus passed by them in his glory but they didn't get it. They hadn't understood about the loaves. Well what in the world does that mean? What does the bread have to do with this?

I think it means they still couldn't bring themselves to accept who he really was. You see there was something more significant than just feeding the people with barley loaves in that miracle of feeding the 5,000. John's gospel tells of these same events but he includes a conversation with the people about the bread (John 6:32). Jesus told the people, "you follow me because I gave you bread." The people said "in the desert Moses gave the people manna, bread from heaven." And Jesus said, "it wasn't Moses who gave them bread, it was God the Father in heaven who gave them bread. And it is now that same God, our Father in heaven who is now giving you the true bread from heaven." They said, "then give us this bread from heaven from now on." **"Then Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry and he who believes in me will never be thirsty...I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.'" John 6:35, 51.**

They hadn't understood about the loaves. You see, he was causing something of his glory to pass by that day as they distributed the bread, for he is the bread of life, the bread of heaven. It was a picture, a demonstration of what he had come to do. He wanted them to see that by receiving him, the bread of life, by taking him into your life as your Savior and Lord, you receive life. He is the source of life for us! Receive him and receive His life. It's about being united with God in Christ and through Christ. It is about union with him. Life with him. But their hearts were hardened. Their spiritual senses were dull. They couldn't see it or believe it or hear

it or receive it. It seemed impossible. They couldn't accept it. They just didn't get it.

You see, it is about so much more than just our physical life here on this planet. It is about spiritual new life in Christ. It is about being partakers of his divine nature as 2 Peter 1 says. But the disciples couldn't see it.

And the disciples weren't the only ones that didn't get it. Let me show you quickly this other group in Mark 7. The Pharisees and some of the teachers of the law came from Jerusalem. They avoided going through Samaria in order to stay clean, so they traveled out of their way, probably traveling 100 miles on foot to get to Jesus and look what they asked him. Out of all the questions they could have asked, out of all the issues that could have been dealt with or discussed, out of all the important things they could have talked about, here is what they came up with after traveling all of this long way. Verse 5 - **“Why don't your disciples live according to the tradition of the elders instead of eating their food with 'unclean' hands?”**

That was it. Why don't the disciples wash their hands? Really? Talk about not getting it! That was your pressing question? But it was for them. Understand, the Pharisees weren't all bad guys, at least not at the start. They were holiness people, concerned with keeping Israel pure, concerned with keeping them from being contaminated by the ways of the pagans around them. They knew that God said to be holy even as he was holy and they were trying to see to it that all of the Jews were holy enough to approach God. They became the self-appointed “holiness police” guarding the nation against unclean and unholy practices and people.

How did this whole thing about hand washing become such a big deal? It wasn't about hygiene, it was about ritual and ceremony and tradition. The law said that the priests were to have clean hands when they entered the tabernacle or temple to serve the Lord. They and their family were allowed to eat part of the sacrifices that were offered, but only if they were ceremonially clean, including their hands. This was for the priests in the temple, but the Pharisees took the rules that applied to priests and wanted to apply that to everyone. They tried to find a way to make being holy before God achievable and acceptable to the average person, so they kind of reduced the instruction down to washing hands. It was a good way to separate themselves from the pagan world. It showed they were separate, different, set apart from the world. It is still that way today. It was about external differences that marked them as separate from the world. Mark points this out to his gentile readers (v3-4).

Psalms 24:4 asked the question, **“Who may ascend the hill of the Lord? (going up to the temple) Who may stand in his holy place?”** The answer? **“He who has clean hands and a pure heart...”**

They decided that clean hands would be one of the signs. We don't have time to go into all of this and perhaps we will next time, but I want you to get this final point. This is what the Pharisees decided would be the defining thing. Ceremonial washing. This is how we can tell the spiritual from the pagans.

Go with me back to Exodus 33:12. Moses said, you've been telling me to lead these people but you haven't said who was going with me to help me. The Lord replied. “My Presence will go with you and I will give you rest.” And look at what Moses said to the Lord. **“If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?” Exodus 33:15-16**

What will distinguish us from all the other people on the face of the earth? For the Pharisees, they had narrowed it down to keeping 613 laws and regulations about what to eat and how to wash your hands and when to wash your hands. It was all about external stuff.

For us modern day Pharisees, we've narrowed it down to denominational distinctives and personal preferences and worship styles. This is how you know we are different from all the people on the earth and we have our own list of what is considered to be clean or unclean. In years past the unclean list was pretty long for some of us. Now the pendulum has probably swung too far the other direction from “everything is unclean and forbidden” to “everything is clean and permissible.” At the heart of it, the problem was not about clean or unclean, it was about elevating the list and honoring the list above honoring God. We made an idol out of keeping the list, focusing more on the outward issues than on the deeper issues of the heart.

Look what Jesus said to the Pharisees in Mark 7:6. He quoted the prophet Isaiah to them and said the prophet was talking about you when he said, **“These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men.”** Then Jesus said, **“You have let go of the commands of God and are holding on to the traditions of men.”**

What makes us different from everyone else on the face of the earth as Christians? Is it our practices, habits, our traditions, our denominational distinctives, our list of clean vs. unclean? If it is, and if that's all it is, that we are different because of what we don't do...then we just don't get it either. You see, what Jesus wanted them to see, what the disciples and the Pharisees both missed, what we often miss as well at times – it's not about all the other stuff, it's not about the lists of clean or unclean - **It's about the Presence of God!** It's about seeing him and knowing him and having his presence alive in our life and in our soul. It's about being full of the Presence and Spirit of God, walking with him in fellowship. Because when we are full of the presence of God, the questions about holiness get taken care of. When the Presence of the Holy One is residing in you, you don't want to compromise with sin. You don't want to do things that grieve God or cause others to stumble, regardless of how free or liberated you may be. You don't want unclean things in your life, not because it is on someone's "spiritual hit list" but because it isn't pleasing to the lord and it grieves the presence of the Holy Spirit that lives in you. The answer for us is the Presence of God.

Clean hands? Good for you. You know the talk, you know how to act, you know what to wear, but what about the Presence of God? Is God's glory at work in your heart and life? Is his glory seen in your character, in your talk, in your walk, in your lifestyle? Clean hands isn't enough. The list isn't enough. You've got to have a new heart and a new life in Christ. Like Moses, we need the Presence of God. If his presence isn't going to fill us and sustain us and go with us, then we don't want to go. Don't send us from here with just a list of do's and don'ts if your Presence isn't going with us. Don't send me out into the world with just a list of what is clean or unclean, send me out full of the Presence and power of the Holy Spirit.

We need to long for and desire his presence above all else. We need that bread from heaven that feeds our soul, that satisfies the longing of our heart. We need Jesus to pass by us today and reveal himself and his glory to us. We need him and his Presence to go before us and to go beside us and to follow behind us.

You see it's his presence that makes the difference. The disciples still just didn't get it. The Pharisees were asking the wrong questions, focusing upon the wrong issues. They didn't get it. But the people – the hurting and the sick and the desperate and the dying – they got it! Look back at Mark 6:54. **“As soon as they got out of the boat, people recognized Jesus. They ran**

**throughout that whole region and carried the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went - they placed the sick in the marketplaces. They begged him to let them touch even the edge of his cloak and all who touched him were healed.”**

The people got it. It was about his presence. Get to Jesus! It’s still the same today. It has to be about his presence in our lives. It’s about being in his presence and being with him. Do we get it? Don’t let your heart get hardened, instead, open your heart and seek him, seek his presence today.

“Lord, pass by us today. Reveal yourself to us today. Let your holy Presence come fill us up today. Capture our hearts once again. And may we, like the people in Mark 6, may we run to where you are. May we find others and carry them with us to get to your divine Presence. Wherever you are, that’s where we want to be. In your presence.”