

Last week in the book of Proverbs we took a look at an open invitation from our God to real wisdom. Our Lord prepares the banquet of real wisdom for us all and he calls us in freely to take it. He sends his servants to find us where we are to invite us in, to lead us to it. He wants us to leave behind our simple, limited understanding of this world that we see by nature and open our eyes to the wider beauty that he has to show us. Of a life that extends beyond the scope we could imagine and a feast to enjoy that is better than anything we could find on the dark streets of our natural understanding.

As usual, when you consider what our God offers, this invitation seems like a no-brainer. Maybe that's the problem. Because clearly people in our world are not lining up to have their fill of this feast of God's wisdom. And if we're honest with ourselves it is often a struggle to bring ourselves away from the worldly distractions and enjoy the blessings God has to offer us in his word. We struggle to leave behind what we know and replace it with the truth and wisdom of God. We touched on this last week, that one of the great deceptions of worldly wisdom is that it presents itself as superior to God's wisdom by making us feel smarter than we really are for following it. It's a trap designed to puff up our egos to keep us away from the saving and comforting truth.

Today, Jesus invites us to consider this a little more closely. To really scrutinize the "smarts" we think we have compared the truth and wisdom that God offers us and to recognize where they are in conflict so we can let God's strength overcome our limitations. Our reading today concludes a discussion between Jesus and the crowds in the book of John that we have been following since the feeding of the five thousand for about a month now. <Read text: John 6:60-69>.

Remember that after Jesus fed the crowds that day, most of them went looking for him the day after. And not because they wanted to know Jesus better, but they wanted to see if they could get another free lunch. When Jesus tried to confront this attitude in them, they stubbornly kept returning to the idea of more food. He tried to offer them something better, the saving truth of his impending sacrifice for their sins. He tried to point them to himself so that they might believe in him and be saved. He spoke very clearly about what was necessary for eternal life, that they must take him in, body and soul and he would keep them alive forever.

The primary response of these people we see here. **"This is a hard teaching,"** (v60) they say. (Note here that when it says his disciples say this, we're using the word in the larger sense. This means all those who were trying to learn from him, not just the usual group of twelve we think of when we hear "disciples"). Now the word here we have in English as "hard" carries with it a few extra connotations that are missed with that translation, even if it's probably the best we could do in English for a single word. It's not "hard" in the sense of difficult to understand. What Jesus said was pretty straightforward. It wasn't complicated or tough to wrap your brain around. No, instead what they mean is that it's something difficult to accept. It's contrary to their normal understanding. It's aggressively different, it's confrontational, it's abrasive, it's almost scandalous to their thinking.

As they are grumbling about how difficult this is to accept, Jesus does not coddle them, but rather becomes even more confrontational. You think this is tough to accept? It's going to get worse! The earthly things, the things of the flesh that you're so obsessed with, they aren't going to help you at all. They count for nothing. You need the Spirit. You need the spiritual things. That's what will bring you life. That's what I've been speaking to you, words of spirit and life. That's what you need! And yet in a confusing sort of way, Jesus goes on to say that the reason these people can't accept what he's saying is because you can't accept it unless the Father makes it possible.

It seems a little backwards at first for Jesus to scold these people for not accepting what they could not, by nature, accept. If God the Father needed to enable them, if the Holy Spirit needed to change their hearts so they could believe this, then why chew them out for it? Shouldn't God be the one in trouble here for not doing his part? Logically that might be where we end up, but we know that can't be true. God doesn't fail, God doesn't make mistakes. And the fact of the matter is that God wanted to change their hearts, God wanted to draw them close. The Holy Spirit was trying to bring them to Jesus.

But the Holy Spirit is not irresistible. When he came to these men and women, they were drawn to God by his power, but they didn't make it. Why? Because they were anchored where they were and refused to let go. What Jesus wanted to teach them was contrary to what they thought they knew. It was counter to their own intelligence, and so to accept the truth of God would mean sacrificing what they knew, it would mean letting go of what they thought was true. And they didn't. They wouldn't. They were smart, capable, experienced adults so why should they expect that they could be so wrong about their concept of the world? Why should they let go of their understanding and intellect when it couldn't possibly be *that* wrong? Letting go of this would mean letting go of more pride than they were willing to part with. It would mean admitting they didn't know as much as they thought they did.

This refusal to let go, to sacrifice their limited intellect, kept them anchored in their ignorance. It resisted the Holy Spirit and would not let him in. They would not give up their own wisdom for the wisdom of God and so they turned and left.

At this point I think it would be appropriate to watch that crowd wander away and literally say to ourselves in all earnestness, "There but for the grace of God..." The Holy Spirit has managed to overcome your initial objections and create a heart of faith in you. You know the truth of God. You know that Jesus truly is the bread of life and that because we feed on him we will live. By God's power our eyes have been opened to a larger world than we see by nature. We accept that our lives are not the limited existence that we can see and touch. Our souls are eternal and there is a life beyond this one. A life that our God died to win for you. We believe that God's greatest victory was won through a humiliating defeat; through death on a cross. By dying, Jesus defeated death for us and won eternal life, which he now gives to us as a free gift by faith.

None of this makes sense to our worldly intellect. But we have sacrificed that intellect at the altar of God and cling to the greater truths that he has caused us to know and believe. But not because we are better people than those who walked away. Not because we were somehow smarter to give up on ourselves or more humble to trust in God. Not because there is something special about us. Only by the grace of God. It is only by his power that we gave up on our own smarts and trust in his truth. Only by his grace that each of us is not one of those who turned and walked away as soon as we heard something we didn't like. For the fact that you are sitting here today, wanting to hear his word and knowing that it is the truth, we should never stop thanking and praising our God.

For most of us here, I would hope that this idea of sacrificing our intellect to God's wisdom and truth is not at all a problem when it comes to the truths of our salvation. Sure, there may be those moments when the devil haunts us to doubt, but by and large I feel safe in suggesting we rest comfortably on this rock of our faith; that Jesus Christ alone is the way, the truth and the life.

But let's not make the mistake then of thinking that we are now done in giving up what we know in the face of the truth of God. We may not struggle when it comes to the saving truths of our eternal life, but that doesn't mean we aren't struggling elsewhere. We all have areas of our lives where we don't want to let go of what we think is true, where we don't want to listen to what God has to say about something because we think we know better and we are not willing to admit we don't actually. It is not okay to just leave it like this. We have to continue to attack the growth of our own "smarts" whenever and wherever it seeks to overcome and strangle out what God teaches us in every area of our lives. We can't just let it go, we can't just say "well I trust God with the important stuff, the rest doesn't matter so much." Those weeds of our sinful intellect won't stay there. They'll keep growing until we think ourselves smarter than God everywhere and they choke out even our saving faith.

So wherever you face this conflict, which will it be; your wisdom...or God's? We face this conflict far more often than I think we realize. Anytime we come across a teaching of the Lord's that we think we have the right to disagree with because it doesn't fit our societal mold. Whenever we face any kind of fear or worry in our lives, are we going to hold to what we can see, or the promises of God that calm those fears? When someone offends us and we want to be filled with anger, will you insist on justice for yourself or leave justice to the Lord and forgive as you have been forgiven? Will the sanctity of God's word be your prime motivation in your worship life or will you look to find a church that does what you want regardless of what it actually teaches? I could go on and on. Whenever the whisper of the devil comes to tell us that we should trust ourselves and what we know before what God tells us, it is utter lunacy to give in. To think that you can know better than God, that you are the right person to tell him how to do things. Rather than a humble, "Speak, Lord..." we come at him with a, "Listen, Lord..."

Remember who you are before God before you think yourself smarter than you are. Let what you know be destroyed and replaced with what God has to teach you. The sacrifice of our intellect to God is an ongoing, daily struggle. And it all begins with the humble response of the disciples who remained, "**Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.**" (v68). What more is there to say? You cannot save yourself. Nothing else and no one else in this world can. Only God can, and only through his holy word. Let go of what you think you know and be filled with the words of life. Study the scriptures that they may cut back the weeds of our self-important knowledge within us.

Between you and God, you know nothing. God knows everything and that is a good arrangement. His knowledge and truth are perfect. It does not change, it does not fail, it is not corrupted with sin like ours. It brings you eternal life and true contentment and peace now. What do you have in your smarts that could compare to that? What of yourself is not worth giving up to keep that? Sacrifice your broken intelligence with humility on the altar of the Lord and replace it with real truth and wisdom. Find that wisdom in his word, find the power to believe that truth through the Holy Spirit in his word. Surrender yourself to the truth of God and let him guide you through this life to the eternity beyond. Amen.