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They Did Not Understand

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Series: The Mind of Christ

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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They Did Not Understand

He seemed to be feeling fine. There were no particular overt symptoms of the disease, at least not to one who looked on the outward appearance. In fact, he appeared to be in much better health than many of his friends who specialized in keeping in shape. He saw no need to go the doctor, because he didn't *appear* to be sick.

The problem was that deep inside his body there lurked a treacherous enemy. It was threatening to cut off the blood supply and when it did, death was a certainty. To the world, he was healthy. To the medical experts who looked at his test results and saw *inside his body*, the diagnosis was terminal. The only difference was they knew something he didn't. When they tried to tell him about it, he wouldn't listen. He said, "*I don't understand. I don't feel sick. Therefore, I can't need surgery*".

The doctor argued vehemently, "*But we have a 100% cure ratio for this disease. If treated now, we guarantee you'll get well*" The patient refused. He didn't *feel* sick. He's not sick any more. He died.

This is, I know, a somewhat somber way to start a Bible lesson. But it is a necessary illustration to draw a parallel between human experience and spiritual reality. What was happening on planet earth 2,000 years ago as Jesus walked the dusty streets of Israel was exactly what was taking place in that doctor's office. The people were sick. They were sick unto death. But they didn't know it. So when someone came and described their illness and the prognosis, and offered a seemingly painless cure, they scoffed. Men and women are still scoffing, *all the way to hell*.

Jesus' ministry, you recall, has just reached the *stage of overt hostility*. The Jewish authorities had a contract on Him, but as the "hit" men came to do their job, their machine guns failed to function. Everything they tried, failed. You see, *His time had not yet come*. His life was not being controlled by an army

They Did Not Understand

of demonic hosts, nor was His fate in the hands of the Jewish temple guards. His life belonged to His Father. And until His Father said, "Come home, my Son," He was invincible. And so are you.

While He was teaching in the temple on the day following the big feast, Jesus and the crowd He was ministering to were startled by the appearance of a group of Pharisees who were dragging a woman into the temple courtyard demanding justice. They brought her to Jesus, desiring to trap Him, either into denying the law or refusing to show mercy. Instead, Jesus upheld the law and simply asked her accusers to throw the first stone, leaving only one stipulation: that the stone-thrower be without sin himself. One by one, the eldest first, they disappeared into the wings until no one was left on stage but the Master and the accused. She was an adulteress. No mistake about it. There was one there who was sinless, who could have condemned her. Make no mistake about that, either. But Jesus demonstrated the mercy of God and let the woman go free with the command, "*Now go, and stop sinning*".

Our story takes up there. The crowd was disputing Jesus' claims to be the light of the world because He was using His own testimony to validate His authenticity, in contradiction to Jewish law. It reads:

The Pharisees challenged him, "Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid."

Jesus answered, "Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. But you have no idea where I come from or where I am going.

You judge by human standards; I pass judgment on no one.

But if I do judge, my decisions are right, because I am not alone. I stand with the Father, who sent me.

In your own Law it is written that the testimony of two men is valid.

I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me."

Then they asked him, "Where is your father?" "You do not know me or my Father," Jesus replied. "If you knew me, you would know my Father also."

He spoke these words while teaching in the temple area

They Did Not Understand

near the place where the offerings were put. Yet no one seized him, because his time had not yet come.

(John 8:13-20 NIV)

They were full of questions. But they were not responsive to His answers. Their next question was: “Where is your Father?”

They had been hearing Jesus talk about “His Father this”, and “His Father that”, and they were fed up with this invisible parent of His. If His Father was so important, why didn’t He show up at one of these meetings and introduce Himself? Over and over Jesus referred to His Father as His only authority. He didn’t speak unless His Father gave Him the words. He didn’t go anywhere unless His Father led Him. This “invisible” one He kept making reference to seemed like a scapegoat to them. Oh, He had told them who His Father was and where His Father was. But they couldn’t grasp things eternal. So they impatiently snapped at the Master, “Where is this Father of yours, anyway?” You can’t blame them in the flesh. They had accused Jesus of being His own witness to His own credentials, and He had responded that wasn’t true, *His Father bore witness to who He was*. Not only that, but He proclaimed that He was only there because the Father had sent Him!

Philip asked the same question months later. He asked Jesus,

“Lord, show us the Father and it is sufficient for us.”

Jesus answered: “Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and you do not know Me? When you have seen Me, you have seen the Father.” (John 14:8b,9 paraphrase)

It’s interesting that Thomas had just asked the other question the crowd was asking that day. He had just said, “Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we find the way?”¹ Jesus answered, “I AM the way.”²

The questions, you see, have ever been the same.

Question 1- “Let us see the invisible, and we’ll believe”.

Question 2- “Show us the future, and we’ll believe”.

Jesus always answers the same, as well.

Answer 1- You have seen the invisible God made visible when you look at Jesus.

¹ John 14:5

² John 14:6

They Did Not Understand

Answer 2- You don't need to know where He is going, because He is. Wherever He is, He is. But the crowds simply didn't understand. He spoke of things eternal; they spoke of things temporal. They didn't understand. They still don't.

Once more Jesus said to them, "I am going away, and you will look for me, and you will die in your sin. Where I go, you cannot come."

This made the Jews ask, "Will he kill himself? Is that why he says, 'Where I go, you cannot come'?"

But he continued, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world.

(John 8:21-23 NIV)

They did not understand. In fact, in verse 27, it says just that.

They did not understand that He was telling Him about His Father.

They just didn't get it. The question is: "*What didn't they get?*" What were they missing? The answer to that question gives us the key to the entire book of life. God is speaking. He is speaking to these who are accusing Him of bearing witness to His own deity. They are creating endless theological smokescreens to keep from dealing with the real issue. The real issue is found in verse 21. The real issue is the only issue that will ever matter. It is a three letter word spelled "s-i-n".

You don't hear much about it anymore. Today, we encourage people to come to Christ for "a better life". So when the fires of persecution start burning, and the floods of tribulation start rising, they want to flee the camp. Life isn't getting better, it may be getting tougher, so God must not be who He said He was. "Where is this 'better life'?" they wonder. The problem is not with God. The problem is, we didn't invite them into the Kingdom on the right terms.

The issue isn't a "better life". The issue is eternal life. And the cause isn't discontentment with the status quo. The cause is sin. Jesus said, "I am going away, and you will look for me, and you will die in your sin. If a man were to preach like that today, he'd be thrown out of half the denominations in town. The issue was: they wanted a Messiah who would deliver them because they were so worthy. God sent a Messiah to deliver them because they were such sinners. They would go looking for

They Did Not Understand

Him, but He would have already gone back to the Father, *and they would die in their sin*. They would have no hope.

Some of you came into the kingdom on the wrong foot. You don't rejoice over persecution, because you think God owes you better. You don't have joy in the midst of tribulation, because you think the God who "saved" you ought to be powerful enough to get rid of that problem. When He doesn't, you're not sure He deserves your full allegiance. My friend, God didn't promise you a rose garden. He promised you salvation. He promised to return you to fellowship with Himself, a fellowship you do not deserve. He did so because He loved you, not because you were such a good catch. You were not a good catch. You were a loser, because you were lost in sin.

You couldn't keep the law because the law was unkeepable and you were in rebellion to having God's authority rule you. There was a chasm between you and a Holy God so wide it couldn't be navigated with a nuclear submarine. You were finished, written off, done. All you could hope for was an eternity in hell, "where the fire is never quenched and the worm never dies". Period.

You, like these Israelites were about to *die in your sins*. But God who is rich in mercy, looked down from His throne on high and began to weep over your lost condition. He loved you. He loved you so much that He laid aside the benefits of His deity and took upon Himself the cloak of a slave and was made in the likeness of man.³ He just flat loved you too much to let you die in your sins. He called to you. He wept over you. He reached out to you. He died for you. And all you had to do to receive a written guarantee of unending fellowship with this wonderful God was to admit your sinful condition, trade your rotten life for His beautiful life, and find eternal life. He did it all. Not to make your life easier, to make your life eternal. Not to free you from the ravages of life on earth, *to put you in the midst of a horrendous spiritual battlefield on planet earth against "principalities and powers and the rulers of the darkness of this world, of spiritual wickedness in high places."* If you came into the fold expecting a picnic, you read the wrong enlistment posters.

That's what Satan offers. Read Matthew, chapter four. He offered Jesus the "good life" on a silver platter. The contract you

³ Philippians 2

They Did Not Understand

signed when you joined God's army guaranteed you tribulation, persecution, misunderstanding, and pain. The tribulation would produce patience. The persecution would produce joy. The pain would produce compassion. And those things are eternal. But salvation was singular in purpose. It was to save you from your sin; to deliver you from eternity in hell. Everything else is icing on the cake. The love, joy, peace and patience God gives you in the meantime He gives you by giving you the tribulation, suffering, and crying that produce them. We want the fruit; we just don't want the storms that water the roots that produce it.

It's time we went back to telling it like it is. Salvation is deliverance from the penalty of sin. And the man or woman who does not come to Christ very simply will die in his or her sins. He or she will spend eternity in hell, separated forever from the God who created them. Jesus went on. He did not lighten the message at all. He just said it again. Listen:

"I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am [the one I claim to be], you will indeed die in your sins."

"Who are you?" they asked. "Just what I have been claiming all along," Jesus replied.

"I have much to say in judgment of you. But he who sent me is reliable, and what I have heard from him I tell the world."

They did not understand that he was telling them about his Father.

So Jesus said, "When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am [the one I claim to be] and that I do nothing on my own but speak just what the Father has taught me."
(John 8:24-28 NIV)

They would die in their sins. Why? Because, according to verse 24, they had contracted a deadly disease. In fact, they had been born with it: the disease of sin. But though the disease could be terminal, it was not incurable. In the same verse we read that Jesus offered the cure: "*Believe that I am the one I claim to be.*" According to the Master, however, they would die in their sins *because they refused to take the cure.*

The basis for their refusal?

1- They didn't *feel* sick. And according to Jesus, "only those who know they are sick will let the doctor help them", (Matthew 9:12).

They Did Not Understand

2- They didn't trust the doctor. They kept asking, "Who *are* you?" They wanted to see His credentials, and if His only letter of recommendation came from this one He called "Father", then they wanted to meet Him. So they kept asking, "Who are you?" And Jesus just kept answering, "I AM just who I've said I AM. I AM the I AM."

They did not understand. How sad. They were 24 inches from God Himself and they missed Him. And because God had created man with the will to choose his own destiny, all He could do was let them go. All He was asking them to do was believe that He was who He claimed to be.

Two thousand years have come and gone, and *that's still all He asks* of any man or woman. The Scripture reiterates, "They did not understand." Indeed. So Jesus went on,

"When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know..."
(John 8:28 NIV)

They were dying. He was offering to save them. But it was:

a) too humiliating (They had to admit they were sinners.)

b) too simple (They couldn't mathematically or academically explain it, so they turned down the one cure in the world for what ailed them. They refused the only chance they would ever have to meet Jehovah God personally and be adopted into His family.)

They could have had it all! But they were so busy arguing trivia they simply drove the last nail in their own coffin and demanded the right to die in their sins. So God did the only thing He could. He let them. And he left them with this warning: "The Son of Man is going to be lifted up. Then you will know who I am." God was going to die so man could be able to live. But unless man would recognize that Jesus Christ was who He said He was, he would die in his sin. The disease would take his life and there would be no other remedy.

The cure had been prescribed, and they didn't want to take it. It was foolishness to them. It was a previously unprescribed medication called "The Cross". The world has, for the most part, stopped preaching the Cross. Oh, we preach about it in passing, but that's not the same. The gospel *is* the Cross. It is the crossroad on the pathway to eternal life. It is a blinding stoplight that demands your attention and requires a response.

They Did Not Understand

It's not just a caution signal. It says, "STOP!"

Should you fail to stop, there is a cliff just beyond called "death" and this is the only stoplight between here and there. It's the Calvary intersection. It's the "Cross" road. Take a right turn at Calvary mountain and you will eventually come to an indescribable paradise, filled with all of the beauty and holiness your heart has longed for all these years.

I know, this road marked "The Way" is very narrow. Not only that, it is bumpy. There are sharp turns, horrendous detours, and seemingly impossible obstacles. You need to know that before you decide which way you'll go. But before you decide, I need to tell you that you won't need to drive anymore. The eternal God Himself has left His palatial mansion in paradise and come to you.

That's Him standing by those three signs marked "The Way", "The Truth", and "The Life". They all point the same way. He will take over for you if you choose to go that way and be responsible to get you safely to your destination. Take the other route, however, and you're on your own.

Sure, I know the other road is wide. Looks more like an interstate, doesn't it? And all the other cars seem to be going that way. Let them. They do not understand. Still others seem to want to go God's way, but they keep looking over their shoulder for some kind of assurance that the trip won't be uncomfortable. Sorry, it will be. But God will be there. That's all the comfort anyone needs. It's just a simple choice, that's all. It is a choice that will determine your eternal destiny.

But you can't not choose. You have to go one way or the other. One way you get escorted safely to heaven over a sometimes bumpy road. The other way you get to drive yourself all the way to hell, where you will die in your sins.

That, then, is the scenario that enveloped the crowd that surrounded the Master in the temple court that day. They were face to face with the only real decision in life that mattered, and they were arguing semantics. Be careful that you don't do the same. Jesus went on:

"The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone,
for I always do what pleases him.

Even as he spoke, many put their faith in him.

They Did Not Understand

To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples.

Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

They answered him, "We are Abraham's descendants and have never been slaves of anyone. How can you say that we shall be set free?"

Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

Now a slave has no permanent place in the family, but a son belongs to it forever.

So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed."

(John 8:29-36 NIV)

That's the beauty of the gospel. It is an individual matter. And even in the midst of great antagonism on the part of the masses, individuals will come to Christ, and God will set them free. The nation of Israel was going to reject their Messiah, freeing Him to go to the Gentile world. But even as the self-righteous religious hierarchy challenged Him at every turn, and even as the heckling crowd shouted seemingly unanswerable questions at Him, many put their faith in Him.

How important it is that we do not judge the success of a ministry by numbers or popularity. In the midst of the greatest times of persecution and tribulation, God will send some in the very heat of the warfare who will trust in Him, *and* those may well turn out to be the real disciples. Maybe there will only be a few. No matter. The quality of those decisions, made in the midst of deep spiritual conflict, are often the lasting ones.

Jesus knew the dangers of surface decisions, so He turned to those who had expressed commitment and added, "If you hold to my teaching, you really are my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free." Signing a card or walking to the front of a church doesn't save you. There must be a conviction of sin that drives you into the arms of a Savior and a willingness to give the reins of your heart over to Him. Then you will listen to His every word and obey His every commandment, because He has set you free from the bondage that held you captive. In time, you can tell those who really meant it when they said, "yes". They hang in there. And those who hang in there come to a knowledge of the truth that sets

They Did Not Understand

them free. When the battle begins to rage, the wisdom of God's word comes to the surface, and they are free to walk in the Spirit in the midst of the storm. They have built their house on the Rock.

Our Jewish friends used even this word from the Master as a jumping-off place for an argument. They cried, "We are Abe's kids, we've never been slaves. We don't need to be set free." Like that man in the opening illustration, they saw no need for a doctor. They were Abraham's seed. They were a cut above the rest. Never had they been in bondage to anyone, they argued. As a nation, they were in bondage even then. That shows how blinded the human heart can get. But individually, *they had been in bondage since birth*. "In sin did their mothers conceive them". And Jesus reminded them, "Everyone who sins is a slave to sin."

The issue, then, isn't whether or not to be slave or a free man. The issue is whose slave you're going to be. Jesus cherished the role of a slave. Again and again He said it. Even in this passage He said it.

"The one who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone,
for I always do what pleases him." (John 8:29 NIV)

"I am a slave of My Father", Jesus said for the umpteenth time. "I only do what makes Him happy." This is the crux of Philippians, chapter two. God became the slave of man so those of us who were slaves of Satan could come to God.

You don't have to be the slave of sin anymore. You can be set free. But first you have to come to the CROSSroad and make a deliberate choice to turn off the speeding freeway to hell and make the turnoff to that cross-country journey to Paradise. The traffic won't be the problem. Most of the folks are on the other road. The problem is that it's just not an inviting journey. There will be bandits and robbers, detours and roadblocks, dangerous cliffs and thunderous storms that render some of the roads seemingly impassable. If you don't understand that going in, you're likely to want to bail out when the car stalls or the brakes go out. Don't worry. Getting there isn't your problem. Deciding to make that turn in the road, however, *is your problem*.

Look carefully for a moment at that fork in the road. What do you see? It looks like a wooden beam rising high in the sky above the mountainside. There's a cross-beam going the other

They Did Not Understand

way about two-thirds of the way to the top. A man's hands have been nailed to that wooden cross-beam. Blood is pouring from His wounds. He is calling out to everyone who passes below.

“Behold, wide is the way that leads to destruction and many there are who travel that way. But narrow is the way that leads to life and very, very few will choose that road.”

(Matthew 7:13,14 paraphrase)

Then you can all but hear a chorus rise up behind Him, singing,

“choose you this day whom ye will serve; (Joshua 24:15b)

“*Who is this man?*” we cry. That’s a familiar question. Then we remember. He said, “When I have been lifted up you will know that I am He.” Jesus used this phrase three times. Its first usage came in John, chapter 3, verse 14. The Master had just rebuked the crowds as He had to so many times thereafter. He said to them: “I have spoken to you of earthly things and you do not believe; how then will you believe if I speak of heavenly things?” Then He startles them with this statement:

“Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up,

that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:14-16 NIV)

The Son of God redrew an Old Testament illustration that was common to them and tried to use it to paint an early picture of the crucifixion. Of course, they missed the point. In John 8, the passage we’ve been looking at, He resurrects that illustration to help them see the gravity of dying in their sins and the only option to that death. Then in John 12:27, the King is nearing the hour of His departure. He says this:

“Now my heart is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour?’ No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour.

Father, glorify your name!” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it and will glorify it again.”

The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

Jesus said, “This voice was for your benefit, not mine.

They Did Not Understand

Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.

But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself.

He said this to show the kind of death He was going to die.”

(John 12:27-33 NIV)

Three times He used that term “lifted up”. The first time it was to demonstrate the *promise of eternal life*. The second time, it was to demonstrate the *danger of refusing eternal life*. The final time He gives the offer of life to whosoever will. It all went back to that time in the wilderness when the angel of death was claiming the lives of God’s people. That death was the result of sin. So God had Moses lift up a brass serpent on a pole, and all they had to do was *by faith look up* and they would instantly be saved. The serpent represented the curse of Satan that was being ended. The brass spoke of judgment for sin that was being taken care of by God.

They didn’t have to *do* anything. It had already been done. All they had to do was *believe*. Now, Jesus was asking the Jews to simply do the same. “Just believe that I am God.” That’s all there was to it. Most of them couldn’t. They died in their sins. Some believed. God gave unto them eternal life, *and they shall never perish*.

You and I live in a world where there are only two kinds of people. We make it so complicated, but there are really only *two kinds of people*. There are those who are sick and know it and let the Great Physician heal them. Then there are those who are sick and won’t admit it, or if they admit it, they won’t believe that this Doctor Jesus is who He says He is.

They will die in their sins. The cure works. And it’s free. The Doctor paid for it Himself. But by refusing to reach out and accept it, they *will die in their sins*. There are, however, some out there who are dying and just don’t know it, who will listen if they hear it explained in terms they can understand. Jesus didn’t die to give them the “good life”. They may already have that. Jesus died to save them from their sins. They must understand that. Having understood that, if they still refuse, *then they have chosen to die*. But if they don’t understand *because* we have been talking about everything else but the Cross, is not their blood on our hands?

They Did Not Understand

Jesus told it like it was. He still does. Many simply did not understand. Many still won't. But, ah, *many believed and put their trust in Him*. Many still will. But someone, Beloved, has to tell them. Simply tell them this: There are only two roads. Most are going on the wide one. In between there stands a Cross. Every man or woman who ever lives must, at some time come to that Cross road. Sin is the issue. The Savior is the solution. The time of decision is now.

OH, THAT CROSS

Oh, that Cross, that rugged Cross
So despicable, so cruel,
Standing on that barren hill
Making God to be a fool.

Laughing, scorning, fallen man
Did not understand
That this awful stroke of fate
Was the key to God's whole plan.

Man was sick and had no hope
Certain was each one to die,
Stricken with the curse of sin
Yet too ignorant to cry.

Then upon that hill He climbed
God Himself upon the tree,
Reconciling fallen man
God was there for you and me.

Oh, that Cross, that blessed Cross
May I shout to everyone
Look and live! He's lifted up!
God has given us His Son.

Preach that Cross and ne'er forget
All the gospel in it lives.
Lift it up for men to see
Let them find the life it gives.

Oh, that Cross, that precious Cross
Give us joy each time we see,
From that Cross we have the truth
And the truth has set us free.

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