

The Worst Day Ever – The Disciples:
When you feel like you just aren't getting it
13th Sunday After Pentecost
August 20, 2009

Let me ask you a question this morning: have you ever failed at anything? Ever devoted yourself to understanding something and you just didn't get it? Spent time working on something over and over and over again, and it just never came together?

Ok, so we've probably all been there, and these individual days probably don't qualify as a "worst day ever" scenario, but let's bump it up a notch: ever felt like this when it comes to Jesus? You've tried to understand the Bible, but you feel like you're just not getting it? Maybe you've tried to be 'good' and you've failed. Maybe you've tried to reconcile your own thoughts and experiences with God's Word and you've come up lacking. Maybe you've wanted to pray and have devotions with your family, but you let other things get in the way. Maybe you've wanted to talk to your friend or neighbor about Jesus, and you've not gone through with it for whatever reason and then felt guilty about it.

Enter our reading today. Will you turn in your Bibles to Mark chapter 7, please? We will be looking at verses 14-23. Mark is the second Gospel in the New Testament, so the order goes Matthew, **Mark**, Luke and John. As always, let take a moment to set the context.

It's been a whirlwind time for the disciples. They just returned from their first missionary journey where Jesus sent them out two-by-two in order to preach the good news and the coming of the Messiah. We read in the Bible that they had a great experience on this journey, and even were able to heal people and drive out demons in the name of Jesus. When they got back, they first found out John the Baptist had been beheaded, and before they even really had time to do much mourning, they had 5000 men, not counting women and children, they needed to feed. Jesus multiplied the loaves and fish, had the disciples gather up all the leftovers, and then sent them off in a boat where they got caught in a storm. He came to them on the water, and they were scared badly because they thought He was a ghost – maybe they even thought He was one of the demons they had just cast out coming to get them. Jesus calmed the storm, and when they landed on the shore, they immediately were faced with another large crowd of people who were bringing the sick to be healed. They were also immediately faced with the enemies of Jesus, who right away began to give them all a hard time. And did I mention that they haven't even had any sleep yet? They've been awake a good 24 hours, give-or-take, at this point. Jesus first answered the Pharisees' objections to Him and His disciples (this was the reading from last week when Jesus told the Pharisees, "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions"), and then He turned to all the people and taught them in this parable, nailing the Pharisees and their way of thinking even more.

Finally the disciples are able to get some alone time with Jesus, and when they do, they ask Jesus to explain what He said to the crowds. In response, Jesus called them 'dull.'

And let's stop here for a moment. The word 'dull' is an okay translation of the original Greek, but it really doesn't capture the full meaning of the word. In the Greek, the word is ἀσύνετος [*asunetos* /as·oon·ay·tos/] and what it literally means is "unintelligent... stupid."¹

It was, up to that point in their time with Jesus, probably one of the worst days they'd yet experienced: the day Jesus called them stupid.

Why did Jesus say this to them? Was He just cranky in responding to the death of John the Baptist and all the demands placed on Him all at once? Was He tired of all the questions and concerns? I don't think so. I believe the key reason is something we don't pick up in this translation of the Greek of Mark. In your Bibles, you can write Matthew 15:16 next to verse 18. Matthew records the same encounter, and in that book a key word gets translated there that is more assumed here, rather than translated due to the way the Greek works here— which I won't get into. You can also write this key word in your Bibles, too, next to verse 18. The word is 'still'. The verse reads in the Greek of Matthew and in the implication of the Greek in Mark, "Are you still so dull?"

The problem wasn't that the disciples asked the question, the problem was *why* they asked the question. They asked because, after roughly two years of being with Jesus, they still didn't get it. They still clung to the old ways, the ways they used to think, the ways they used to assume the world and their relationship to God worked. Remember the context: the Pharisees were there giving Jesus a hard time, and the question of the disciples later on showed that they were still giving credibility to the Pharisees' way of thinking. If they were not doing that, they would have understood what Jesus meant when He told the crowd "*Nothing outside a man can make him 'unclean' by going into him. Rather, it is what comes out of a man that makes him 'unclean.'*" It's because they were still thinking in the way of the Pharisees that they didn't understand what Jesus was saying and asked to have it explained to them. "We don't get it Jesus! What the Pharisees say makes sense: you are unclean if you don't wash your hands in a particular way!" The best answer their understanding gave them was vastly different from what Jesus was saying, and they were having a hard time reconciling the two. It was one of the worst days ever for them.

Here's the question for us today: are we so much different than them? We do the same thing. We cling to what we *just know* is right, even though we have God's Word that tells us what is REALLY right. We think our thoughts and opinions are the right answers, the right outlooks on life, but our thoughts and opinions are often formed by a decidedly non-Christian world, whether we realize it or not. We often look at things from a human perspective rather than from a Godly perspective. And when that happens, I have to imagine God is saying of us, "Are you still so *asunetos*? I've given You My Word; I've spelled it all out for you in black and white. I've made it just as clear as I can. Why don't you get this? Why are you still clinging to the ways of the world?"

¹ Enhanced Strong's Lexicon: 801 ἀσύνετος

It can be our worst days ever when we feel disconnected from Jesus, and can't figure out why, while at the same time we're still clinging to our own thoughts and opinions and ways of doing things. I heard a great line recently: "Do you know how to make God laugh? Just tell Him what your plans are!"

So what's the solution? When we are feeling disconnected from Jesus; when we are feeling like our prayers are just bouncing off the ceiling; when we feel like we're all alone and the Holy Spirit just isn't working in our lives; when we are experiencing our worst days ever in our relationship with Jesus, what do we do?

Remember first and foremost what we have said throughout this series. Even on our worst days ever, and even on those days when we feel like we are all alone and disconnected from God, remember that is not true. We are not abandoned; we are not forsaken. God loves us so much it literally killed Him. Brought Him back to life, too. Just because we don't 'feel' close to God, or feel as though we just aren't in the relationship with Him we should be, doesn't mean our Savior has left us alone. Unless we find ourselves in outer darkness with weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, our Lord is still here, He's still beside us, and He will absolutely never let us go.

In light of that, is there anything we can do during those worst days ever when we feel cut off and alone and separated from Jesus?

First, we need to do what the disciples didn't. We need to ask the question, "Got God"? Really? Do we really 'got God'? In every aspect of our being? You see, that was the issue for the disciples. Even though they traveled with Jesus and knew him personally, He still wasn't a part of every aspect of their being. They hadn't fully submitted to Him, hadn't fully given themselves over to Him. Have we?

I'll share a quick story with you. A friend of ours right now is struggling in her faith, and she's been asking some very good questions, but she prefaces them with statements like "I can't give up my thoughts on such and such." "I don't believe this and that about what the Bible says", and yet she can't figure out why she's experiencing her worst days ever feeling so disconnected from Jesus. Her problem is that she's coming to Him on 'her terms', rather than coming to Him in humbleness and just submitting to Him. As long as she, as long as we, hang on to our thinking, our 'terms', we will never know Jesus and have the relationship with Him that we could.

This may sound silly, but think of this in terms of being married. If you were getting married, and your fiancé said to you, "I'll marry you, but I'm not going to stop dating other people" what kind of marriage would you have? How close could you be to one another? That's what we do when we come to Jesus and say, "I'll believe in You, but I'm not going to let go of what I have been thinking and clinging to, my opinions and thoughts."

Got God?

How do we 'get God', so to speak? First and foremost, we need to spend time in His Word. Isn't it interesting that throughout this entire series, as the various people we've looked at experienced their worst days ever, they all went back to the Word of God? We need to do that too.

Here's a tip when reading God's Word: have a pencil or pen with you, or a yellow crayon (NEVER use a highlighter when reading the Bible – it will bleed through the page badly, but a yellow crayon can 'highlight' something without making the opposite page unreadable). As you read along, when you come to something that just rings with you, underline or color it. It doesn't matter if it's a 'deep' thing or not. If it touches you in any way, make a note of it, and then pray about that particular verse or passage. Thank God for His Word that touched you, and ask for His Spirit to reveal even more to you. You know what will happen? The Spirit *will* reveal more, and you'll have a hunger to read God's Word more and more and more. Remember, ignorance of the Bible comes from ignoring the Bible.

A second thing we can do to help 'get God', is to spend time in prayer with Him. We've mentioned this before – you can't have a relationship with someone you won't talk to. Try that this week: husbands don't talk to your wives, and wives don't talk to your husbands. Parents don't talk to your children, and children don't talk to your parents. Brothers don't talk to your brothers and sisters, and sisters don't talk to *your* brothers or sisters. What will your relationship be like at the end of the week? Stronger or weaker?

It's the same thing with God, on a much larger and deeper scale. We need to talk to God, we need to be in conversation with Him. Praise Him for who He is, thank Him for all He's done for us and all He's given us; confess our sins and ask for forgiveness; lift up to Him those thoughts and questions we have.... and then stop talking... and listen. God speaks in the quietness of the heart, through the words of the Bible, and, dare I say it, through pastors and Christian teachers!

Finally, the biggest thing we can watch out for, and the biggest thing we can do by the power of the Holy Spirit working in us to avoid a 'worst day ever' scenario when we are "asunetos" as it relates the things of God, ties to verses 20 and 23 of our reading: "*What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.'*" and "*All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'*"

When Jesus said these words, He was talking about food. The dietary laws said Jews couldn't eat certain foods, and when they did eat, they had to perform a certain ritual in washing their hands. Now we understand that certain types of food, or eating with hands that haven't been cleaned in a certain way doesn't make someone 'unclean' – that is sinful and unacceptable to God. But, at the same time, there is something we need to remember.

In your Bibles you can write, 1 Corinthians 15:33 – *Do not be misled: "Bad company corrupts good character."*

Here's the point: what *are* we feeding ourselves – our hearts, our minds, our spirits? What are we putting into ourselves? Are they things that bring us closer to Jesus, or take us further from Him? I submit to you that everything falls into one of these categories: either bringing us closer to Jesus or taking us further away from Him. Those things some might say are neutral, and don't take us closer or further away, I submit to you *do* take us further away – if it ain't bringin' us closer to Him, it's not helping us in any way, and is, in fact, keeping us from getting closer to Him.

So, though we don't need to worry about food or rituals bringing us closer or taking us further away from Jesus, we do need to think about what we are surrounding ourselves with, and if that is helping or

hurting us. How do you know if you or someone else is investing in the things of God and putting those things inside of them? Watch their life, their language, their attitude. How close are they, how close are we, to Jesus? Are we, are they, experiencing the worst days ever in their relationship to Jesus? Are they disconnected from Jesus? Feeling like they just don't get it? Feeling... asunetos about the ways of God? Perhaps it's related to what we are putting into us, and what we are allowing to influence us.

I am NOT saying we need to divorce ourselves from the world, and go and live on the top of a mountain and have nothing to do with the rest of the world. What I am saying is that what comes out of our heart, is in direct relationship to what we are putting in our heart. *For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly.* If what we are allowing ourselves to experience and put in our hearts are these types of things, then it should be no surprise when this is what comes out in our lives. What are we reading? Watching on TV? Viewing on our computers? Listening to on our iPods or the radio? When home computers first came out, there was a word that was used that fits perfectly with this. The word was GIGO, and it stood for "Garbage In, Garbage Out".

So what are we left with today? There are times when we all will feel disconnected from Jesus; when we feel asunetos about the things of God. In those times we turn to His Word, we go to Him in prayer, and we check our lives to see what we are feeding our hearts.

And we remember, above all, He who holds us in the palms of His nail-scarred hands, will not let us go.

Will you pray with me please?

Lord Jesus, thank You for Your love for us that caused You to lay down Your life. Thank You for promising to be with us always, even to the end of the world... and beyond into the next world for those who call on Your name as their only Lord and Savior.

Jesus, it can be hard when we feel like we are disconnected from You. It can be hard when we feel like we're just not getting You, just not understanding You. It can be hard when what we think and feel is not in line with Your Word.

Forgive us. Be with us and remind us of Your love for us, and correct our thinking as we spend time in Your Word and in prayer with You. Send Your Spirit to us to bring us into a deeper faith and more in love with You.

Change us, Spirit. Change us to be the people You want us to be. People who are not asunetos about the things of God, but people who hunger for God's Word, and grow deeper in our relationship with You, our Heavenly Father, and our Savior.

We pray it in Jesus' name,

Amen