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DOES THIS STUMBLE YOU?

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“On hearing it, many of his disciples said, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?” Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, “**Does this offend you? Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before!**”

– *John 6:60-62*

These words Jesus said to his disciples after telling them something very shocking. Though he explained his apparently shocking speech, many thereafter refused to walk with him and instead, returned to their old ways. (*John 6:66*) Many, but not all.

What did Jesus say that was so offensive? And why would Jesus even say shocking speech to a crowd of spiritual babes? An examination of his words reveals the wisdom of his conduct that day. And we, today, can take the experience as an object lesson that can expand our spiritual horizons and draw us closer to the Father.

The Crisis in Capernaum

The previous day, Jesus had fed a crowd of about 5,000 with just 5 loaves of bread and 2 small fish. (*John 6:1-13*) Many of those who ate and were satisfied went looking for Jesus the next day, following him in their boats across the sea of Galilee to Capernaum.

“When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, “Rabbi, when did you get here?” Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill. **Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life**, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”

– *John 6:25-27*

These Jews were impressed to follow Jesus, not because of his teachings, but because Jesus had satisfied some material need. Jesus wanted more from his followers. He wanted them to look beyond the flesh and reach out for spiritual realities. However, these Jews did not understand Jesus’ intention. Instead, they asked him what **fleshly works** they could perform to gain the Father’s favor:

“Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?” Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”

– *John 6:28-29*

Jesus here reiterated that he was speaking of spiritual things. But again they dragged his words back to earth:

“So they asked him, “What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? **What will you do?** Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’”

– **John 6:30-31**

Seeing that they were not getting his point, Jesus changed his tactic and used their own illustration as a means to get through to them:

“Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” “Sir,” they said, “always give us this bread.” Then Jesus declared, “**I am the bread of life.** Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. **For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.** And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.”

– **John 6:32-40**

In spite of this effort, these fleshly-minded Jews still did not get the point. They were not open to a spiritual message. Their reply showed that their interest in Jesus’ teachings was minimal at best. Instead of seeking to understand Jesus’ words, they used his words as an opportunity to prove themselves more righteous than Jesus, intimating that he was either lying or delusional:

“At this the Jews there began to grumble about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” They said, “Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I came down from heaven’?”

– **John 6:41-42**

By this time, Jesus was beginning to grow tired of their resistance. Yet he made another attempt to explain his words by means of their illustration:

“**Stop grumbling among yourselves,**” Jesus answered. “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day. It is written in the Prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God.’ Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me. No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. **Very truly I tell you, the one who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life.** Your ancestors ate the manna in the

wilderness, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which anyone may eat and not die. **I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats this bread will live forever.** This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

– **John 6:43-51**

Instead of hearing the spirit of Jesus’ words that he is the living bread, the Jews dug their resistant heels in further by making a ridiculous literal interpretation:

“Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, **“How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”**”

– **John 6:52**

Of all that Jesus said, these Jews heard only what they wanted to hear. Like so many people today, they heard only what they could use to get out of the responsibility of worshiping with spirit and truth. (**John 4:24**)

Seeing that these Jews were not rightly disposed to truth, Jesus boldly used their own words to make his point. He wanted to draw out the true intentions of those who were listening so that only those whose spirit drew them to the Father (**John 6:43**) would gain entrance into the kingdom of the heavens:

“Jesus said to them, **“Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.** Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.” He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.”

– **John 6:53-59**

And the response from some was just as he expected:

“On hearing it, many of his disciples said, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?”

– **John 6:60**

This one “shocking” phrase was more powerful to these fleshly minded Jews than all the words of life and truth that Jesus had previously taught them. Yet, Jesus did not consider this to be a loss for the kingdom. Instead, he used this as an opportunity to expand the horizons of the disciples whose minds were disposed to truth:

“Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, **“Does this offend you? Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before!**”

– **John 6:61-62**

Here, Jesus was telling them that if they could not comprehend something as simple as an illustration that was clearly explained, how could they possibly understand a spiritual reality when they come face-to-face with it. He was teaching them to open their minds to possibilities beyond their current understanding so that they can receive even greater truths. He went on:

“The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit and life. Yet there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. He went on to say, **“This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them.”**

– *John 6:63-65*

Jesus was not saying that the Father selects which ones can come to Jesus. That would mean the Father is partial, which we know He is not. (*Romans 2:11; Acts 10:34-35*) Jesus was saying that those who come to him must come on the terms set forth by the Father – with spirit and truth (*John 4:24*), being led by spirit. (*Romans 8:14*)

So while this occasion caused many who were not spirit led to become manifest, his **true** disciples were not stumbled:

“From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. “You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve. Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.”

– *John 6:66-69*

Jesus’ true followers were not stumbled. They recognized that Jesus had taught them so much, especially that they had been given everlasting life. (*John 6:47*)

Jesus taught that the Law Covenant mediated by Moses had come to an end, along with its burdensome customs. (*Matthew 5:17; Romans 10:4*) He taught that men were no longer servants or slaves of God, but faith sons of the Father of All. (*Galatians 3:26*) He taught that mankind was a brotherhood (*Matthew 23:8*); that we should love not only our family and our neighbors, but also our enemies (*Matthew 5:43-44*); and so many other things. In fact, practically everything Jesus taught was new and revolutionary. And those who could not put up with his teachings were left behind.

Being Guided By the Spirit of Truth

We asked in the introductory paragraphs, Why would Jesus even say such shocking speech to a crowd of spiritual babes? The reason is two-fold: (1) to manifest their intentions, and (2) to expand the spiritual horizons of those with good intentions.

There was so much that Jesus wanted his apostles and disciples to know.

“I have much more to say to you, more than you can now bear.”

– *John 16:12*

And while he certainly ‘pushed the envelope’ on occasion, he was careful not to go so far that his true followers were harmed. But it is true that whenever someone expands his horizons, that person is being taken out of his comfort zone. And that can be quite uncomfortable. How will such a person react? Like the faithless, fleshly minded Jews, or the stunned but humble apostles?

Today, spiritual men and women understand what Jesus was saying. They are not stumbled at hard to understand or perplexing statements. Unlike the faithless Jews who were stumbled at Jesus’ words, spiritual people today recognize that there is much they do not know, and they trust that the Spirit of Truth will do its work on their behalf.

We no longer have Jesus with us in the flesh to speak his truths and explain his teachings. But we have something just as helpful in the Spirit of Truth:

“But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, **he will guide you into all the truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. He will glorify me because it is from me that he will receive what he will make known to you.**”

– *John 16:12-14*

Clearly, the Spirit of Truth is here to expand our horizons – our spiritual vision. He would guide us into the truths that Jesus was unable to speak. That means that we will be exposed to new and different ideas and the Spirit of Truth, which is better described as the ‘conviction’ of truth, would work with our spirit to bear witness to its accuracy. He allows us to experience the ‘ring of truth’ in wise sayings. (See [The Bestowal of the Spirit of Truth](#).)

When we maintain a circumscribed world of what we accept as truth, the Spirit of Truth cannot do any work on our behalf. There is no room for new truth. (See [Expanding Our Spiritual Vision](#).) If we limit our world of truth to what we have already learned, we are no longer learning. – we are simply re-processing old data. But know that when we step out of our little world of truth, we will unquestionably experience discomfort. Will we ‘go off to the things behind’ or will we move forward in our faith with the Spirit of Truth as our guide?

An examination of Jesus’ teaching methods show that he used illustrations, not concrete facts, to teach his followers new truths. Likewise today, when we seek to expand our horizons – our spiritual vision – the best method to do so is by way of illustrations where we use our imaginations to comprehend spiritual truths. Our imagination is a gift from the Father. It is the means by which we exercise faith. Paul tells us:

“Now faith is confidence in **what we hope for** and assurance about **what we do not see.**”

– *Hebrews 11:1*

If we cannot actually ‘behold’ the things we ‘hope for,’ how else can we exercise faith except by way of our imagination? We are also told:

“Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.”
– *Colossians 3:2*

How can we apply that scripture except by the use of our God-given imagination? Surely Paul is not telling us to just become stargazers!

Unfortunately, so many Christians today have become ‘institutionalized’ in their religious thinking. They are locked inside of old teachings and old dogma, and cannot, or will not, come out, notwithstanding that Jesus freed us almost 2,000 years ago. Jesus taught that his wonderful truths would be expanded by the Spirit of Truth. And John wrote that our anointing continues to guide us into new truths:

“As for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. **But as his anointing teaches you about all things** and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him.”
– *1 John 2:27*

Overall, we see three potential reactions to new spiritual ideas that do not conflict with known truth: (1) we can be quick to reject it because it does not fit into our current world view; (2) we can accept that there are things that we do not know and though we do not understand it at present, we leave open the possibility that we may understand more about it in the future; or (3) we can remember that Jesus told us there would be more truth to learn and then trust the Spirit of Truth to work on our behalf.

As for us, we take the third option. We will continue to introduce new ideas for our readers to ponder and we will let the Spirit of Truth do its work, while at the same time respecting the sensitivities of our audience. We believe this is the way Jesus taught and we can imagine no greater teacher or teaching method.

We welcome your comments.

“Elaia Luchnia”