

Not Always Understood

"Follow Me Through Surprises" Series, January 4 & 5, 2024 | Mark 4:1-20

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We are not always understood.

In the case of the "Wicked Bible," one word made all the difference in how it was understood.

In 1631, the printer who published the first edition of the King James Bible decided to print another run, confident that the Bible would sell well.

However, this run had a couple of errors in it. For instance, Exodus 20:14 omitted the critical word "not" so that one of the Ten Commandments read, "Thou shalt commit adultery." The king was not amused; he fined the printer and shut him down.

Then the king ordered that all misprinted copies of the Bible be rounded up and destroyed.

One word made all the difference in how the printer and the Bible were understood.¹

But experience teaches us all that we are not always understood.

If you are married, you've probably been misunderstood by your spouse before.

If you have ever raised children, then your children may have thought you were unfair or unkind at times, despite your best intentions.

If you have ever tried to communicate in a crisis, you have probably been misunderstood, even though you tried really hard.

Misunderstandings can embarrass us, strain relationships, and even cost us jobs or friendships.

We are not always understood—and sometimes we are deeply misunderstood.

If we struggle to understand each other every day, how much more do people misunderstand when we talk about God?

We talk about who God is, how God has helped us, and what God wants from us and for us.

We speak with the best of intentions, wanting to share truth and give life.

But people misunderstand us; they misinterpret what we're saying or misread our intentions.

Some people hear fiction when we talk about fact, or judgment when we mean help.

Why do some people misunderstand the Word of God?

It's an important question because when they misunderstand the Word of God that we share, our relationships can become strained or broken. People can be hurt, and we can get hurt.

When people get hurt, we become reluctant to share the Word of God.

So why do some people misunderstand the Word of God? And what can we do about it?

¹ <https://bookriot.com/history-of-the-wicked-bible/?t>

In our Scripture reading for today, Jesus addresses this question.

Jesus was not always understood.

The Jewish religious leaders did not always understand Jesus.

Today we read from Mark chapter four, but back in chapter three, the Jewish religious leaders misunderstood Jesus, and it started leading to accusations and conflict.

The religious leaders watched Jesus' actions and words.

They saw Him perform miracles, but they also saw Him break their traditions and claim extraordinary authority for Himself. He implied that He was the Messiah and Son of God.

They concluded that Jesus couldn't be either Messiah or Son of God. They accused Him of blasphemy, which is insulting God or claiming to be God when you're not God.

They said instead that Jesus cast out demons by the power of demons.

They didn't understand Jesus at all.

His own family did not always understand Him.

Jesus' family saw that He was drawing crowds, and they saw that He was drawing unwanted attention from the religious authorities and the politicians.

They were frightened for Jesus and themselves.

They concluded for a time that Jesus must be crazy and came to take Him home.

Jesus' own family didn't always understand Him.

The crowds did not always understand Him.

The crowds were amazed by Jesus' miracles and wowed by His teachings.

They wanted help for their problems, and Jesus seemed to offer it.

They were inspired and felt a surging sense of hope that the world might be changing.

So, more and more people kept coming to Jesus, and Jesus taught them.

But Jesus knew that the crowds didn't really understand Him. They wanted someone to deliver them from the Romans, cure their diseases, and feed them.

They didn't understand that Jesus was really there to save them from their sin and offer them forgiveness, new life, and eternal life. The crowds didn't understand.

This brings up an important question about us, because sometimes people misunderstand us when we're sharing the Word of God.

Does misunderstanding mean we're doing something wrong?

Like Jesus, sometimes we share the Word of God.

And, like Jesus, there are times when we are misunderstood or rejected. Sharing goes wrong.

When we are misunderstood or rejected, does that mean we're doing something wrong?

Our own responses to misunderstanding and rejection make it seem like that's what we think.

When we share the Word of God and get rejected, we can get hurt and want to quit.

When we think about sharing the Word of God and think about being misunderstood, we think that we've got to find a better way of sharing the Word. We need better training. We need to know and understand more ourselves, because we think that the problem is with us.

In fact, we sometimes fear misunderstanding and rejection so much that we refuse to start sharing at all, because we don't think we will have the right words to say.

Does the fact that people misunderstand the Word of God mean we're doing something wrong?

Jesus was THE MASTER COMMUNICATOR, and He was not always understood.

We know this because we read what He said and see the reaction that people had to Him.

Plus, Jesus is the Word of God made flesh. He IS God's speech to us.

As the Son of God, Jesus kind of knows how to communicate.

And yet, Jesus was not always understood. He was frequently (usually) misunderstood.

So, if the master communicator was not always understood, then we should expect to be misunderstood as well. It's not a flaw. It's just reality.

In His Parable of the Sower, Jesus explains why.

The truth is that people respond differently to the Word of God.

Jesus' parable explains why people respond in such different ways to the Word of God.

Jesus tells a parable about a farmer sowing seed.

As the farmer casts the seed, it lands in different places with different outcomes.

Some falls on a hard path where birds eat it before it can germinate.

Some seed falls on rocky ground and germinates quickly but withers without roots.

Other seed falls among the thorns where weeds choke it out.

Some seed falls on good soil and grows into a healthy plant that produces an abundant crop.

This parable can be a roadmap for disciples to examine their own hearts.

The trampled path is like the hard heart that refuses to receive the Word of God, allowing the devil to take it away before it has an effect on a person.

The rocky soil is like the fickle heart that gets excited but doesn't put down roots. When trouble comes, the fickle heart lets the work of God die.

The weedy ground is like the distracted heart, which receives the Word but is distracted so that the Word of God gets choked out.

The good soil is the open heart that receives the Word and bears fruit by living a changed life and making more disciples of Jesus.

This leads to the question, "What is the condition of your heart?"

If we have hard, fickle, or distracted hearts, that question should lead us to change our hearts.

This parable also can be a recipe for cultivating disciples.

We want to help people with hard hearts break up the soil in their lives.

We want to help those with fickle hearts pick the rocks out of the soil of their hearts.

We want to help those with distracted hearts pull the weeds out of their lives.

We want to cultivate healthy hearts that yield a bumper crop.

The Parable of the Sower is a good roadmap for examining our hearts and also serves as a helpful recipe for cultivating disciples. But neither is the fundamental purpose of this parable.

Jesus told this parable to explain the differing ways in which people respond to the Word of God.

The truth is that people respond differently to the Word of God.

Some people refuse to listen.

Some people listen, take it to heart, get excited, and then walk away.

Others listen, but they are so busy that nothing real ever happens.

Some listen, take the Word of God to heart, grow, live changed lives, and make disciples.

Different people respond differently to the Word of God. That's what Jesus is saying.

How does that truth shape how you think about sowing or sharing the Word of God?

The Parable of the Sower explains that people simply respond differently to the Word.

Jesus simply points out that this is the way things are.

So, the Parable of the Sower helps Jesus' disciples understand why people respond so differently to Him. Jesus is like the Sower in the parable. He is spreading the Word of God, and people are responding differently to Him.

But the Parable of the Sower also invites us to see ourselves as under-Sowers with Jesus.

Why do some people refuse to listen to us?

Why do others get excited and then fade away?

Why do some listen but get so distracted that nothing ever happens?

Why do some people receive it and live totally changed, fruitful lives?

Jesus wants us to understand that it's not US! It's THEM! People in a fallen world respond differently no matter how skilled or well-intentioned we are.

A person's response to the Word depends on having ears to hear it.

When children are born, we wonder if they have ears to hear, and there are tests to help us know.

Of course, a newborn can't tell you what they hear—or don't hear—but there is a test that can determine if a newborn's ear is capable of hearing.

There are tiny hairs in the inner ear, and they vibrate when they receive a sound.

When these hairs vibrate, they make a small sound that echoes back into the middle ear. That's the sound that the test picks up.²

From that sound, we can tell that a newborn has or doesn't have an ear that can hear.

² <https://www.asha.org/public/hearing/Otoacoustic-Emissions/>

Just like newborns physically lack ears to hear, the Bible tells us that not everyone has ears to hear.

The prophets foretold this long ago.

After Jesus told the Parable of the Sower, the disciples didn't understand it and came to Jesus for an explanation.

He told them that some misunderstanding is to be expected. It had been foretold in **Isaiah 6:9-10** which says:

...“Go, and say to this people:

“ ‘Keep on hearing, but do not understand;

keep on seeing, but do not perceive.’

Make the heart of this people dull,

and their ears heavy,

and blind their eyes;

lest they see with their eyes,

and hear with their ears,

and understand with their hearts,

and turn and be healed.”

Some people will simply not have ears to hear what God is saying to them.

Jesus' parables confirm this spiritual condition.

Parables have two purposes. They draw on everyday experiences to reveal spiritual truth to some, while concealing it for others.

Jesus said that His disciples would receive the mysteries of the Kingdom of God.

However, many in the crowd would never get it. They had already made up their mind, so they couldn't hear or understand Jesus' parables. Without ears to hear, they found that parables sounded like gibberish to them, confirming the decision that they had already made to reject Jesus.

However, disciples should attune their ears to hear God's voice.

Yes, Jesus works in our hearts to make us open to God, but He expects us to lean in and try as well. He says, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear."

Jesus wanted his disciples and us to try to understand the parables.

He wanted them and us to tune our ears to hear God's voice.

Do you have ears to hear what God is saying to you today?

God is speaking to you today, calling you to Himself and to obey Him.

Are you looking for His sometimes-subtle voice?

When you hear His Word, do you lean in with expectation?

Do you listen carefully for His guidance?

And when He speaks, are you eager to obey?

That's having ears to hear what God is saying.

So, I ask you again—do you have ears to hear?

Disciples spread the Word regardless of results.

Colonel Sanders made a lot of chicken before he made it big.

Harland Sanders was born in Indiana but made his home in Kentucky where he opened a gas station, then a small restaurant, followed by a bigger restaurant.

Twice Kentucky honored Sanders with the ceremonial title of “Colonel” in recognition of his contributions to the state’s food.

Colonel Sanders perfected a recipe for tasty fried chicken made fast.

He became a successful restaurant owner—until the mid 1950s when a highway bypassed Sanders’ restaurant. Colonel Sanders was 66 years old and broke.

So, he got into his car and went one restaurant to another pitching his chicken recipe and cooking method. Legend says that Sanders was rejected 1009 times before his secret recipe sold. Whatever the real number is, Sanders persevered.

And his recipe did finally sell. By 1960, Sanders had 400 franchises.

In 1964, Sanders sold the company for \$2 million and became the company’s spokesman—proving the power of perseverance.³

Like Colonel Sanders, we are going to face difficulties when we share God’s Word. Will we respond with his kind of perseverance?

Do different responses make us hesitant to share the Word?

You may have faced different responses.

You may have shared Jesus with people only to have them tell you that what you are saying made no sense at all. That may have been embarrassing.

You may have poured hours of time into some people who show great promise as disciples, only to walk away when life gets difficult. That must have been frustrating.

You may have preached your heart out, hoping that people with great potential as disciples would live changed lives and make many new disciples, only to watch them get distracted by life. I can’t imagine what that’s like. It’s tough, I know.

You may be living with broken relationships because people misunderstood you.

Your own family may be torn apart by it.

Do the different responses to Jesus make us hesitant to share His Word?

We must push through our discomfort.

We must push through our discomfort because that’s what Jesus tells us to do. Sharing Jesus and spreading God’s Word are just what disciples of Jesus do.

We must push through our discomfort and share God’s Word as well. Although we may not see a harvest today, we have no idea what God will do in the future!

³ <https://www.encyclopedia.com/history/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/colonel-sanders>

And we must push through our discomfort with people's differing response to His Word because some seed falls on good soil! Some people have open hearts and receive Jesus and bear much fruit. Their lives are changed, and they make many more disciples of Jesus.

So, let's share God's Word—faithfully and fearlessly—regardless of how people respond, trusting that God will bring fruit in His time