

Alêtheia Christian Fellowship

November 24, 2019

Happy Thanksgiving!

“Birds and Leaven”

8:00 ~ Service - Communion is for all Christians

9:30 ~ Fellowship & Adult Sunday school

10:30 ~ Service with the King's Kid's - Communion is for all Christians

NEWS

Giving Tree & Sheeran Care Package

Joint Elder/Deacon/Staff Meeting ~ Thursday evening, December 5, at 6:00

Church Christmas Party ~ Friday evening, December 13, at 6:00

Candlelight Service ~ Tuesday afternoon, December 24, at 4:30

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Visit the website ~ www.myaletheia.com ~ Hear a sermon at

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- 1) What do the birds signify?
- 2) What does the leaven signify?
- 3) What is a “Wisdom-style instructional opening”?

MATTHEW 13:31&32 ~ ³¹NASB He presented another parable to them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; ³²and this is smaller than all other seeds, but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.”

A _____ beginning ends with a _____ result.
The outcome was so substantial that birds can make a home.

Jesus was bluntly saying that you can't judge the _____ by the beginning. Birds often stand for _____ in the Bible. The Bible uses the imagery of birds with positive, neutral, and negative _____ elsewhere.

There is no indication that Jesus was saying that the tree is the church and the birds are _____ people making it their home.

Jesus wasn't giving a botanical lecture. His example is both hyperbolic (tree) and proverbial (seed). _____, I went to Flathead High School a hundred years ago. _____, "A watched pot never boils."

Christianity started very small and today, it is the largest religion, with 2.3 billion people claiming that title. Beyond that, Jesus was clearly looking to the _____ (Eschatology) with this parable.

MATTHEW 13:33 ~ ^{33NASB} He spoke another parable to them, "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened."

It is a _____ leavening the flour? Jesus recognized two _____, He maintained that they were _____ from each other, that each had specific _____ to play in this life, but that both were _____ in worth and importance eternally.

Do you seriously think that in Heaven you'll be an...

"Leaven," is thought to be _____ Biblically speaking. It is זְאֵר (sə-ör), or what has been leavened – like leavened bread, חֶמֶץ (CHä-mëtz). The purity of plain flour, once exposed to leaven, could never be retrieved (Galatians 5:9). It's not always negative (Leviticus 7:13, etc.).

The word “Hid,” ἐγκρύπτω (ĕn-křüp-tō), instead of _____? (Luke 13:21).
 Three pecks, σάτον (sä-tōn), of flour is _____ dough. It is nearly 43 quarts or
 about _____ pounds. Then it’s the number three.

The nuance difference here is how the Kingdom has an _____ on the
 whole. The point was that Jesus’ Messianic ministry might seem dismissible, but it
 would lead to a _____ impact.

1) Some people cannot let go of the idea that _____ and _____
 stand for evil. 2) They want to _____ these two parables with the Parable of the
 Tares.

The Kingdom of Heaven is here in the form of a massive mustard bush and a
 massive quantity of flour, but in both cases _____ people are also present
 in the form of nesting birds and leaven.

*Fill out the other side, detach this part of the page, and place it in the
 offering plate or the prayer/suggestion box in the lobby or with an Elder or
 Deacon of the church.*

God Bless You!

MATTHEW 13:34&35 ~ ³⁴NASB All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables, and He did not speak to them without a parable. ³⁵This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: "I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden since the foundation of the world."

Once again, we can easily get the idea that Jesus used parables to be intentionally _____ in an effort to keep His listeners from understanding Him.

The quote is from _____ and is what is technically called a "Wisdom-style instructional opening." Psalm 49:1-4

Biblically, because the information is God speaking, the consequence of not paying attention, is _____.

Biblically, the people that do not understand, are the people who already believe that the know and so they're not even _____.

Check all that apply – detach and place in the offering or the prayer box

_____ I want to talk with the pastor about _____

_____ I want prayer for _____

_____ I want to volunteer to _____

_____ I want more information about _____

_____ Other _____

Name _____ Address _____

Phone _____ Email _____

Alêtheia ~ Matthew 13e ~ 112419

Welcome Friends

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO
MATTHEW
A CLASH OF KINGDOMS

Alêtheia Christian Fellowship



Matthew 13:31&32 ~ 31NASBHe presented another

parable to them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; 32and this is smaller than all other seeds, but when it is full grown, it is larger than the garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches.”

This is another parable that causes confusion when people try to analyze it too closely. Quite frankly, the gist is just what the gist is... A tiny beginning ends with a big result. A very small seed produces a huge bush big enough for birds to nest in. How is that possible?

Anyone without knowledge of such things, who looked at a single small mustard seed would dismiss it as inconsequential, insignificant, unimpressive. They would say there's no way that tiny thing can produce anything of any worth or size. Yet it grows to such a large size it's like a tree!

In fact, the “Mustard” plant has become so substantial that birds are able to make their home in it, trusting in its branches to support their nest where they'll raise their young.

Some translations have the birds resting, or perching, in the large bush. The verb as it relates to birds, means to nest, not perch. The “Mustard Seed” has produced a home.

Why the parable? People around Jesus were probably saying, “How can Jesus be the Messiah?”

“I mean, He’s been at this for a while, and what does He have to show for it? He’s the leader of a small band of misfits. How is this ever going to amount to anything?”

Jesus was bluntly saying that you can’t judge the end by the beginning, you can’t judge the worth, scope, or impact accurately, from the way it starts.

Any reasonable person, watching the start of this church through the first few months, would have said there’s no way it will ever amount to a thing. There’s no way it will last another few months... Well that was 16 years ago. Final outcomes are difficult to judge from initial beginnings... Especially, where God’s involved.



A lot of people get hung up on the birds. Birds often stand for evil in the Bible. While true, that's not always the case. In fact, Jesus uses the imagery of birds with positive, neutral, and negative meanings elsewhere, depending on the point He's making.

There is no indication that Jesus was saying that the tree is the church and the birds are evil people making their home in the church... While we know that happens, and to some degree, that's the point of the previous parable, it's not His point here.

Part of why it doesn't work that way, is we become the interpreters of Jesus, rather than allowing Him to

interpret Himself. As an example, someone else could say, with every bit as much conviction, that the tree is faithful Israel and the birds are the Gentiles that find a home in her. Again, not unreasonable. Can you see how it goes when we allow ourselves to speculate?

As we've discovered, parables are simple and that's why they work. When we overcomplicate them by looking beyond the intent of the speaker, we run into problems... Tree) Such as, while mustard plants, in extreme cases, can get to be more than ten feet tall, they are never, really, trees.

They are a garden-type annual plant. They're not even perennial plants, let alone, deciduous trees. As such, they are so temporary, so relatively small, and so relatively weak, that birds rarely trust mustard plants with their nests and their young.

Seed) In addition to that, mustard seeds are not technically the smallest seeds, something naysayers love to point out. Well, Jesus was wrong – the Bible is not infallible!

There are smaller seeds than the mustard seed, such as begonias, petunias, and orchids. Just realize that

parables work to illustrate a point in a dramatic fashion – they are never intended to be dissected, especially for their literal precision! Jesus' actual point was you could take a single seed – the smallest one in the bunch – and from that a plant could grow so incredibly large it would be to birds like a tree suitable to live in. The implication? Small things can be deceptive in their power to produce big results.



To answer the claim that Jesus made a mistake, let me say that He didn't say that the mustard seed was Seed) literally, physically the smallest seed on earth, Tree) nor was He literally saying that a mustard plant was a tree.

He wasn't giving a botanical lecture. He crafted a parable to make a point that is entirely unrelated to seeds, plants, trees, or gardening.

The example is both Tree) hyperbolic and Seed) proverbial. Seed) We know from Greek, Persian, Roman, Egyptian and Jewish sources from the time, that the mustard seed was the smallest seed proverbially.

What that means is that people from modern-day India to Spain and from the Black Sea to the Blue Nile, regardless of the factual details, used the mustard seed as the smallest thing, proverbially speaking. Jesus simply used language that everyone then was completely familiar with.

It's like us saying, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks." That's not literally true. "If you play with fire, you will get burned." "A picture is worth a thousand words." "No news is good news." "A watched pot never boils." "Life begins at forty," none of those are literally true, but we understand the meaning conveyed.

We have thousands of proverbial sayings that are not literally true, but we all know what they mean. Mustard seeds back then were in that category. Back then everyone was well acquainted with the mustard seed as proverbially the smallest of the garden herbs and vegetable seeds.

Tree) Beyond that, Jesus uses a bit of hyperbole regarding his description of the seed producing a tree. It's never really a tree – everyone, including Jesus, knew that, far better than we do today. In extreme circumstances a mustard plant could grow to 10, or 12 feet, and in such a case, it would pass for a tree, especially from a bird's perspective.

Again, the point of His parable, is that something small and seemingly insignificant, can become surprisingly big. Specifically, the growth Christianity would enjoy considering the seemingly disappointing start, would shock people. From a physical perspective, Christianity started with an itinerant preacher who had little support, was betrayed by His own people and brutally executed. Today, Christianity is by far the largest religious group on the planet with 2.3 billion people claiming that title. From a human point of view... The

smallest start possible has resulted in the biggest result imaginable.

Beyond that, Jesus was clearly looking to the end with this parable. Eschatologically speaking, Jesus started off smaller than anything and yet what would be produced would give an eternal home to vast numbers of people who would be saved through Him.

In that same vein...



Matthew 13:33 ~ 33NASB He spoke another parable to them, "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a

woman took and hid in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened.”

Hopefully, without me saying a word, you get the gist of this parable.

I'll just point out a couple of cool features and then we'll take a closer look at the whole. Did you notice that it's a woman leavening the flour? Just prior, in the parable of the Mustard Seed, it was a man who sowed the seed. It gives a nice symmetry, but more than that, it is another example of how inclusive Jesus was concerning women.

Rabbis at the time rarely spoke of women and never to them. When they did, it usually had some negative connotation. Jesus maintained gender role differences, but He clearly elevated females as entirely worthy equals of males spiritually speaking.

In plainer language, Jesus recognized two genders, He maintained that they were different from each other, and that as a result, that each gender had specific roles to play in this life, but Jesus also made clear that both genders were equal in worth, value, importance,

significance and in whatever other way they could be eternally measured.

In Christianity, the Bible always addresses women directly when describing, discussing or demanding something pertaining to them. Never, ever, does Jesus, or any Christian Bible Author, tell men to MAKE women do anything.

In Colossians and Ephesians, we find that women are supposed to be submitted to their husbands. In neither case, does it say that husbands are to MAKE them submit. That the Pastor, or the Elders, or the church, is supposed to enforce the command. In both places God speaks directly to the wives. He commands them to submit voluntarily.

My friends, whether a wife submits, or not, and if she does, how well, and to what degree, she does, is strictly between her and God – it is their relationship, no one else's.

For the husband's part, he is commanded by Almighty God to unconditionally love his wife even to the point of dying for her. That means to love her, even if she's horrible at the submitting thing – it's not a man's job to

MAKE a woman be a better Christian, it's his job to make sure he's the best Christian he can be.

Likewise, ladies, you cannot make your husband be a better Christian. What you can do, is be the best Christian you can be, and pray fervently for him.

That was free bonus material. While I'm at it, let me assure you that gender is no different than size, strength, nationality, or ethnicity... These are all temporary physical categories.

Do you seriously think that in Heaven you'll be an American, or a Canadian? That you'll be Oriental, Caucasian, Hispanic, or whatever jumbled up mixture of ethnicities you've got going on? That you'll still be relatively short or tall, narrow or wide? What in the world makes you think you'll still be male, or female?

We fuss and fight over categorizations that are so temporary that in the grand sweep of eternity they cannot even be measured. How foolish.

Let it go for now – back to our parable. “A woman hid leaven in three pecks of flour until it was all leavened.”



More unusual things... Things that would have struck the people hearing it back then as odd. “Leaven,” is generally thought to be a negative or even evil thing Biblically speaking. It is רָאָץ ($\text{s}^{\text{a}}\text{-}\ddot{\text{o}}\ddot{\text{r}}$), but more commonly is what has already been leavened – like leavened bread, חֶמֶץ ($^{\text{C}}\text{H}\ddot{\text{a}}\text{-m}\ddot{\text{e}}\text{tz}$).

Leavening is basically what starts the fermentation process and thereby causes bread to rise and be fluffy. We typically add yeast to flour and some translations go with that, but it is a bit different. What they used was basically sourdough. They always kept a small amount of leavened dough in reserve. Generally, they would

take that, mix it with water and add the frothy fermenting soupy brew to the new flour.

The purity of plain flour, once exposed to leaven, could never be retrieved. Leavened flour couldn't ever be made into unleavened flour - it could never be purified again. That's why it lends itself so well to a negative connotation. Just as Paul wrote in Galatians 5:9, 9NASBA little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough. Biblically, "Leaven" was often used as a metaphor for sin in general, often, pride, or hypocrisy, in particular.

Not always though. As with birds, sometime the meaning is neutral and sometimes even positive. Leviticus 7:13 commands, 13NASB 'With the sacrifice of his peace offerings for thanksgiving, he shall present his offering with cakes of leavened bread. A Rabbinical proverb of the time goes, "A good judge sprinkles his verdict with the leaven of mercy."

The word "Hid," instead of mixed, or something like that, is strange. Why would she hide the "Leaven"? The word is ἔγκρύπτω (ĕn-křüp-tō), a New Testament hapax legomenon (occurring only one time). It is generally accepted to mean "Hid." Luke's Gospel uses

a simpler related word that definitely means “Hid” (Luke 13:21). Why “Hid”?



Three pecks of flour is unusual for two reasons. First, it's flour, not dough. Adding water is a must in order to turn flour into something useful, like bread. Second, it's a massive quantity. “Three pecks” is really three σάτον (sä-tön), nearly 43 quarts of dry flour. The HCSB has 50 pounds of flour and the NIV has it as 60 pounds. I came up with 47 pounds with my own calculations, but whatever the precise amount, that's a lot of flour! It's enough for more than 60 loaves of bread.



Then it's three σάτον. Maybe if it was two, or four, or eight, people wouldn't get hung up on it – nah, it wouldn't matter... Many folks can't resist defining the number three in the parable – of course, like all allegorical interpretations, none can agree what it symbolizes. Some say it refers to Jewish, Greek and Barbarian. Some Jewish, Gentile and Samaritan. Some say the body, spirit and soul. Some say the Trinity. Some say Noah's three sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth. Some say the three continents of the Bible, Asia, Africa and Europe – too bad Western Hemisphere. Some say Adam's Covenant, Abraham's Covenant and Christ's Covenant. Some point to Sarah

baking for the three supernatural visitors discussing Sodom and Gomorrah with Abraham. You get the idea.

Again, we must keep in mind what parables are, and way aren't. We're looking for a simple point.

The easy, straightforward, meaning is that a little thing that seems irrelevant, hidden, inconsequential... In the end, has a dramatic effect.



The nuance difference here is how the Kingdom has an influence on the whole. The previous parable, like this one, was about the Kingdom starting small but having a big effect. There, the “Birds” nesting showed that the

Kingdom will grow to provide a safe and secure future – a home.

This parable shows that the influence of God – through the Kingdom, through Jesus, through His Message, through Christians, permeates the entire world. It's possible that it means that God influences the entire person who accepts Jesus, but most likely it has the whole world, broader scale in mind.

Jesus' point here, was that His work would create a new reality that would be ubiquitous – it would be everywhere – it would have an influence on everything. God through the present Kingdom would have a global reach.

We wouldn't want to push that farther. If Christ's influence is everywhere affecting everything, why aren't all people Christians? That is a thought well beyond the intended scope of the parable.

Contrary to the spring-loaded assumption we make, Jesus wasn't talking about bread, or dough to make bread. He was simply saying that even a vast amount of flour is, and here's the key, forever and inextricably modified by a tiny bit of leaven.

Once the leaven was added, nothing could alter the new properties of the flour. It could never be used to make unleavened bread again. A relatively small amount would forever change the relatively massive amount.

The point was that Jesus' Messianic ministry might seem dismissible, but it would lead to a global impact.

While both parables stress the growth of the Kingdom in size and scope, the difference between them is the first looks to the home established, while the second one looks at the influence caused.



Let me throw a monkey wrench into the program. There's another way to look at these two parables that is worthy of our attention. It's not only common, it is basically the opposite of what I've been saying.

1) Some people cannot let go of the idea that birds and leaven stand for evil. They latch on to the negative connotation associated with those symbols. 2) In addition, they want to closely tie these two parables with the Parable of the Tares, making all three parallel to each other - all making the same basic point.

The Kingdom of Heaven is here in the form of a massive mustard bush and a massive quantity of flour,

but in both cases evil people are also present in the form of nesting birds and leaven.

The basic point is true, because that's the point the Parable of the Tares made... It has to be true. In a very general sense, without delving into the particulars of each parable, that interpretation is okay, again, because it is a true reality from Scripture elsewhere.

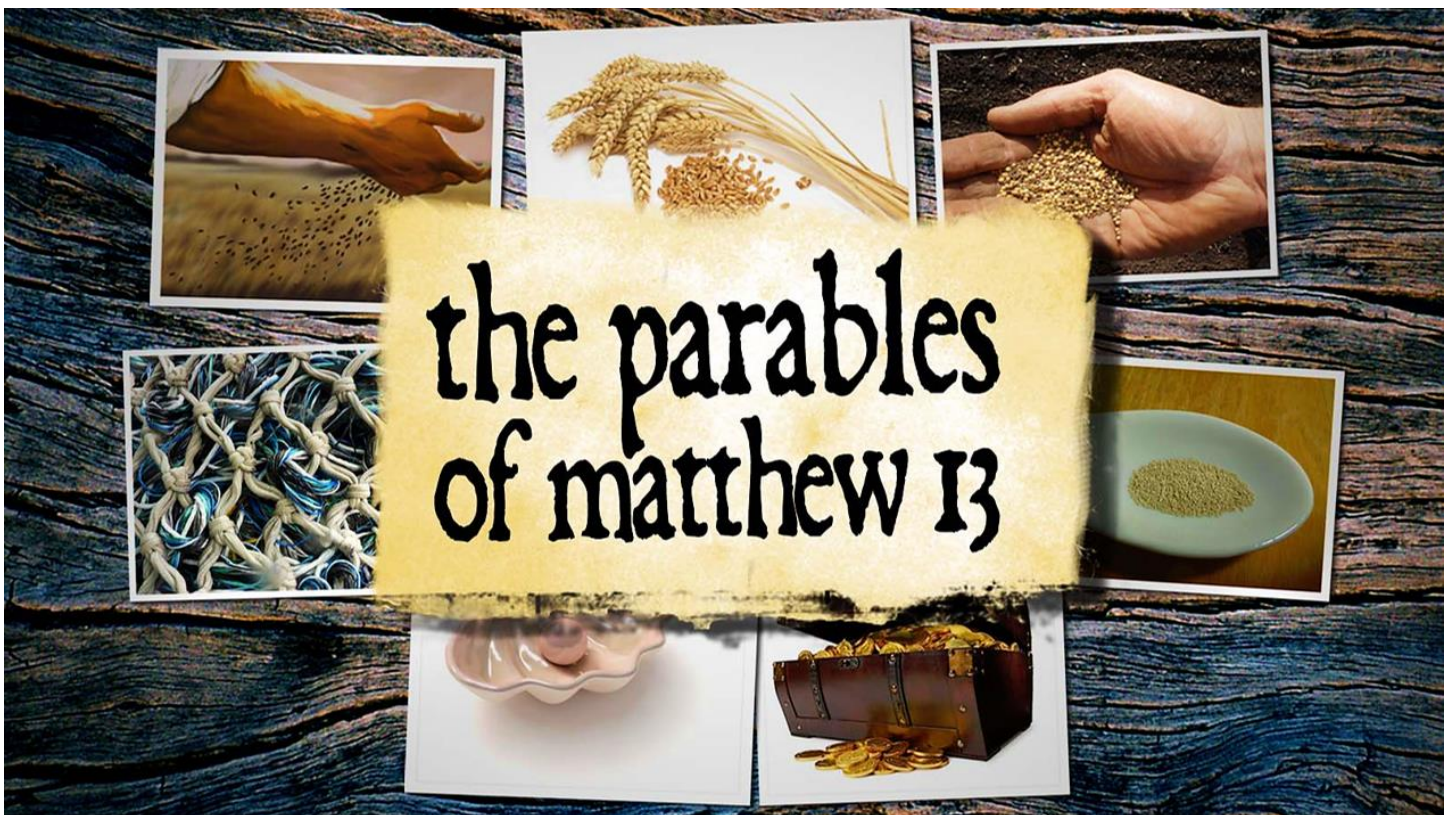
There are better reasons to see it the way I first laid it out, but I don't see the harm in seeing it this alternate way. For the original audience the question about small beginnings resulting in big outcomes was far more necessary than it is for us, who have already seen it grow.

Besides that, nowhere do we see any eventual attempt to get rid of the birds in the tree, or the leaven from the flour. There are other reasons to go with the interpretation we started with, but I wanted you to be aware of the negative interpretation in case you meet someone who wants to defend it or even fight about it.

At the end of the day, that interpretation is still Biblically true. What they miss isn't going to derail Christianity. Let them have their idea. It's not going to hurt anything.

It is perfectly fine to disagree about such things and still love – still be unified.

There are many places where one can interpret the Bible in what I would say is a less accurate way, but still have a Biblically acceptable outcome. Recognize that, respectfully discuss, but don't fight.



Matthew 13:34&35 ~ 34NASB All these things Jesus spoke to the crowds in parables, and He did not speak to them without a parable. 35 This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet: "I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things hidden since the foundation of the world."

Once again, we can easily get the idea that Jesus used parables to be intentionally cryptic in an effort to keep His listeners from understanding Him.

The quote is from Psalm 78:2 and is what is technically called a “Wisdom-style instructional opening.” It’s a thing. In ancient times it was a commonly used rhetorical opening specifically designed to get people to pay close attention to what you were about to say.

It is a call for the audience to listen up, because important wisdom information is about to be passed along using a variety of rhetorical means and methods so wise people will be wiser people. Psalm 78 starts, Psalm 78:1-4, 1NIVMy people, hear my teaching; listen to the words of my mouth. 2I will open my mouth with a parable; I will utter hidden things, things from of old— 3things we have heard and known, things our ancestors have told us. 4We will not hide them from their descendants; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, his power, and the wonders he has done.

The point is to get the people to understand by telling them in advance that the information is vital, and they need to focus.

Another example is found in Psalm 49:1-4, 1NIVHear this, all you peoples; listen, all who live in this world, 2both low and high, rich and poor alike: 3My mouth will speak words of wisdom; the meditation of my heart will give you understanding. 4I will turn my ear to a proverb; with the harp I will expound my riddle. Proverbs 1:5-7, 5NIVlet the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance— 6for understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise. 7The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Be a wise person by paying close attention and you'll be even wiser, otherwise you will not understand the new material, you won't get smarter and you'll prove that you're a fool, because of it. The Bible and other ancient writings are full of these "Wisdom-style instructional openings."



Biblically, they are more serious, because the information about to be shared always has to do with God speaking to the people through a prophet, leader, sage, or in this case, through His Own Word made man. The consequence, of not paying close enough attention to grasp the teaching, is that Divine Judgment follows.

Those unwilling to grasp and so absorb the new information are unable to do what the information directs and so, are unable to please God. They fall under His wrath, rather than His grace, because they did not... In a sense, believe Him. Trust Him, Surrender to His reign. It is impossible to be IN the Kingdom of

Heaven and resist God's reign in any way, shape, or form.

So again, the point wasn't that Jesus was intentionally obfuscating His Message – just the opposite – He was going to great lengths to make it understandable... Even using many parables to help in the process.

The problem was they still didn't get Him, because they had hard hearts. The only thing left, is judgment.



Please connect something here. Notice Biblically, that a person's hard heart, is the thing often highlighted as the reason people are unsaved. Notice also, that just

as often, it is said that the thing that prevents salvation is a human pride. How can both things be said to prevent salvation? A person's hard heart is a direct result of them thinking that they are right.

Please think about that. The only reason a person doesn't surrender to Jesus fully is because they do not see it as important enough to do it. Because... They are already convinced in their mind that it isn't that important. They have reasoned in themselves that it isn't necessary.

Being closed to new information means you've decided it isn't worth your attention. That is, in itself, an arrogant position. What's dangerous about it is that most people don't even realize that they've put themselves in that boat.

I've oftentimes mentioned confirmation bias. It's where we have already formulated a strong opinion, whether we will admit it, or not, and we therefore see what resonates with, or confirms our thinking, instead of what's really there.

Biblically, the people that do not understand, are the people who already believe that they know and so

they're not even listening – and the second bit – is they don't even realize that they aren't listening. If you were to ask, they'd say they heard it all – the problem is they only heard what they wanted to hear.

Many people over the course of human history have said the same basic thing. Here's how Victor Villaseñor said it, "The beginning of all wisdom is to understand that you don't know. To know is the enemy of all learning. To be sure is the enemy of wisdom."

The wiser a person becomes, the more they recognize how much they don't know – it results in a humble attitude towards learning. That's the essence of God's statement, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. To fear God, means that you take Him seriously enough to humbly seek and search, work and cling to His Word.

The Message was easily understandable to a person willing to be open and working to search for it. How's your attitude?