

## Conclusion

When Jesus walked this world, he spoke and taught about the kingdom of heaven. Frequently his hearers did not understand what he said. Two reasons account for this: one they had not been born again and could not see the kingdom of heaven; and two the Holy Spirit had not yet come to lead them into all truth. All this began to change at the day of Pentecost. Not only did the disciples begin to understand what he had taught them. They began to receive a completely new understanding of the Old Testament Scriptures as well.

Since those days, billions have heard and read the words Jesus and many more things in the Scriptures. Some no doubt have been born again and seen the kingdom of heaven and understood what they have heard and read. Others have remained in darkness.

Many, perhaps millions, have taught others what they have read. Some have understood and brought blessing and understanding to their hearers. Others have been blind leaders of the blind. Not being able to see heavenly things they have put earthly things in their place. They have found natural substitutes for spiritual realities. New birth becomes baptism; spiritual food becomes physical bread and wine; the house of God becomes a church building and many more things are downgraded from the divine to the human level.

We will only understand the words of Jesus, and much more in Scriptures, if we are born again by the Holy Spirit and then progressively led into the truth by the Holy Spirit. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him, these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit” (1 Cor 2: 9, 10); and he prayed for the Ephesians “that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened ...” (Eph 1: 17, 18). He knew that there was no other way that they could understand what he wrote, or anything else of spiritual truth. Let us pray that prayer for ourselves.

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# Understanding Jesus

will recognise that such teaching may have much for their minds, but it has nothing for their spirits, and they will understand the warning Jesus gave. Others will simply be blind followers of the blind and believe they have the truth.

## Further Misunderstandings

Did Jesus say more things that we have not understood?

On his last night on earth he comforted his disciples with the words, “Do not let your hearts be troubled” and “I will come again and receive you to myself” (John 14: 1, 3). Did he mean a personal, physical coming? The early church expected his physical return, and most believers have done so ever since. But wait a minute! He comforted his disciples with the words that he would go away and come back and take them to be with him; but nearly 2000 years have passed and he has not done it yet – at least not physically. I would hardly call that keeping a promise! But read a bit more of John chapter 14. “I will not leave you as orphans: I will come to you” (18). “My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our dwelling with him” (23). Much of the rest of his farewell talk was about the coming of the Holy Spirit – the Comforter! Jesus did keep his promise and come again in his spirit on the day of Pentecost, and his disciples were wonderfully comforted. Their hearts were no longer troubled. (I have written on this subject in “*The Coming of the Lord*”.)

Jesus said, “Whoever believes and is baptised will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16: 16). But baptised how? With water or with the Holy Spirit? Most people have always assumed water, but that is probably because the church has known a lot about water baptism and very little about the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said to one of the thieves on the cross beside him, “Today you will be with me in paradise”, but he certainly was not baptised with water. Water baptism has its place, but it is no substitute for baptism with the Holy Spirit. Romans 6 talks about the subject of baptism, and most people have assumed water baptism; but only the Holy Spirit can bring the blessings described in that chapter. (I have written on this subject also in “*One Baptism*”.)

How many more things did Jesus say that we have not understood? No doubt there are many.

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“Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you do not have life in yourselves”.

The Bible is a precious gift from God to man, and a source of great blessing, but we must not put it in the place of Jesus and call it our spiritual food.

What does it mean then to eat his flesh and drink his blood? Only the Holy Spirit can teach us.

## My Father's House

Many people today have a head knowledge of the fatherhood of God. The mental concept of God being like an earthly father who loves his children and provides for their every need is easy to grasp. The experience of God's fatherhood is much better than a mere doctrine of it. Only the experience can satisfy our inward needs. How can we experience it? By being born again!

But where is God's house? Was he left homeless when the Romans pulled down the Jewish temple in 70 AD? No problem! He has an endless supply of cathedrals, churches and chapels, not to mention temples and mosques, if he wants to dwell in such places. And millions of people believe he does! Those who have been filled with the Holy Spirit know that he doesn't. Wonder of wonders, he prefers to dwell in us!

## The Yeast of the Pharisees

The Pharisees of the Bible have long since left this earth, and taken their doctrines with them; but they are not without their modern descendants!

Matthew 23: 1 - 36 is devoted wholly to the Pharisees. 8 times we find the words: “**Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!**” The disciples must have been utterly shocked to hear Jesus haranguing the great Bible teachers of their day. How could these Bible scholars be wrong? These were the people who sat in Moses' seat, prayed long fluent prayers, tithed all their possessions, knew the minute details of the law and even crossed the seas to make one convert. Yet these were the very people who called for Jesus to be crucified.

The Pharisees of today have the same spirit. They are outwardly correct in all their teaching, but they totally lack inward reality. Those who are taught by the Holy Spirit and know inward reality with God will sense this lack. They

## Introduction

Jesus was a great teacher, and everyone always found it really easy to understand what he was saying. Yes or no? Well, let's look at some of the feedback:

## The Feed Back

But **they did not understand** this statement, and they were afraid to ask Him (Mark 9:32).

But **they did not understand** what He said to them (Luke 2:50).

But **they did not understand** this statement; it was concealed from them so that they could not grasp it, and they were afraid to ask Him about it (Luke 9:45).

**They did not know** He was speaking to them about the Father (John 8:27).

Jesus gave them this illustration, but **they did not understand** what He was telling them (John 10:6).

**His disciples did not understand** these things at first. However, when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things had been written about Him and that they had done these things to Him (John 12:16).

They said, “What is this He is saying, ‘A little while’? **We don't know** what He's talking about!” (John 16:18).

And what did Jesus himself say:

So He said, “The secrets of the kingdom of God have been given for you to know, but to the rest it is in parables, so that looking they may not see, and hearing **they may not understand**” (Luke 8:10).

Jesus replied, “**You do not understand** what I am doing now, but you will understand after these things” (John 13:7).

## Why did they not Understand?

Why did all these people fail to understand the world's best teacher?

Isaiah tells us the basic reason: "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not My ways." This is the Lord's declaration. "For as heaven is higher than earth, so My ways are higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" (Isa 55:9).

Paul expressed the same truth in a different way: "The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness to him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1Cor 2:14).

Jesus was speaking about things that were completely outside the experience of his hearers. All the time he was speaking on a higher level than they could understand. He was from above, and they were from below. They took his words literally. Sometimes his words made no literal sense: "Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?" Sometimes his words made the wrong literal sense: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."

The Bible describes the natural man as being in a state of blindness. Imagine trying to explain the difference between red and blue to someone who has been blind from birth. You could tell him that blue was the colour of the sky, and red was the colour of blood; but he has never seen the sky and he has never seen blood. He would not understand. Jesus also was talking about things his hearers had never seen.

## Examples

Let's look now at some cases where Jesus was not understood:

### Nicodemus – the New Birth

Jesus replied, "I assure you: unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." "But how can anyone be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked Him. "Can he enter his mother's womb a second time and be born?" (John 3: 3,4).

Nicodemus had no experience of the new birth. He had never heard of it before and he had never met anyone else who had experienced it. Also he knew a lot about the kingdom of Israel and the Roman Empire, but nothing about the kingdom of God. So he took the words of Jesus literally, as referring

– including Adolph Hitler and Robert Mugabe. It's difficult to believe they were all born again!

Others believe the new birth is becoming religious or changing one's church. They know about the outward change that took place in the Apostle Paul's life, when he stopped persecuting believers and started following Jesus, but cannot understand the total change that took place inside him.

Politicians in America may claim to be born again to get the votes of others who also claim to be born again; but in England they'd probably lose more votes than they'd gain!

In natural birth a child comes into this world and immediately begins to see the things around him. At first he has no language and understands very little of what he sees. He has vast amounts to learn and the process takes many years, but in time he will understand things infinitely beyond his childhood's vision and imagination.

So it is when someone is genuinely born again. He is born into a spiritual world and begins to see the things of the spirit. If he is rightly fed he will continue to grow in spiritual understanding, and have the capacity to understand what Jesus said, and much more both in scripture and the wider world.

## Spiritual Food

Every religious leader and indeed every church-goer has heard the words of Jesus about "eating his flesh" and "drinking his blood", but only those who have been born again and fed on spiritual food will be in a position to understand their real meaning. Those who have not will simply interpret the words as meaning "holy communion" or the "mass" or whatever name they give to that ceremony. Many believe that wafers and wine are miraculously turned into the body and blood of Jesus. The Latin words, "hoc est corpus", ("this is the body") which purport to achieve this miracle, have entered the English language as "hocus pocus"!

Others have been taught that the Bible is their spiritual food. This sounds right and in a limited sense is true; but it is not what Jesus said. He did not say, "The Bible is the bread of life". He said "I am the bread of life". He did not say, "Unless you read the Bible, you do not have life in yourselves". He said,

that things have not changed! “They did not understand what he said” will still be the epitaph on mass denominational graves.

The basic problem is the same now as it was when Jesus was on earth with his disciples. Paul’s statement: “The natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God” is as true today as it was when he wrote it. By nature man is blind to spiritual truth, and till his eyes are opened he simply cannot see it. Or, to repeat the words of Jesus: “I assure you: unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

The difference today is that the words of Jesus have become familiar. Every pastor, minister, priest, vicar, bible teacher and theologian knows that Jesus told Nicodemus he needed to be born again, but not all pastors, ministers, priests etc have been born again themselves! All these religious experts know that the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples of Jesus at Pentecost; but far from all of them have *personally experienced* the coming of the Holy Spirit and his power to reveal the meaning of what Jesus said.

Those who have been born again and gone on to experience the enlightening work of the Holy Spirit will be in a position to understand the words of Jesus. Others will not. They will remain in ignorance. Unable to keep silent they will produce alternative explanations of what Jesus said. Being ignorant of heavenly truth, they will put earthly substitutes in its place.

We will review some of the same topics we looked at previously and see how this works out.

## The New Birth

Many down the centuries have experienced the new birth and at least begun to see the kingdom of heaven. Others, including many theologians and religious leaders, are of course totally familiar with the words of Jesus on the subject, but have nothing of the experience. They will not make the same mistake as Nicodemus by taking the words literally. Instead they will find alternative natural explanations for them.

Multitudes believe that the new birth takes place automatically at water baptism, and hasten to baptise their babies. I was baptised by force without my consent when I was only 1 month old, but did not experience the new birth till 18 years later! Millions, perhaps billions, of people have been baptised at birth

to natural human birth. There was no other way he could take them. Later on, no doubt, these words became a wonderful reality in his life, but at this point they were meaningless.

We should look at the exact words of Jesus to Nicodemus. I remember a children’s chorus which went

“Listen to the words of Jesus spoken clear and plain:  
If you want to go heaven you must be born again!”

Well, he didn’t say that! What he actually said was that someone who was not born again would not be able to **see the kingdom of heaven**. In other words he would be blind to spiritual truth and unable to understand it. That is exactly what we find with Nicodemus and the further examples at which we will look.

## The Woman of Samaria – Living Water

Jesus answered, “If you knew the gift of God, and who is saying to you, ‘Give Me a drink,’ you would ask Him, and He would give you living water.” “Sir,” said the woman, “You don’t even have a bucket, and the well is deep. So where do You get this ‘living water’?” (John 4: 10, 11).

Nicodemus came from the top level of society and this woman came from the bottom, but they had one thing in common: they had not been born again and could not see the kingdom of God. This woman also took the words of Jesus literally. She knew all about ordinary water, but had never heard of living water. That kind of water belonged to a spiritual realm of which she was totally ignorant. She could see ordinary water with her natural eyes, but being spiritually blind she could not see living water.

## The Jews – Spiritual Food

“I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread he will live forever. The bread that I will give for the life of the world is My flesh.” At that, the Jews argued among themselves, “How can this man give us His flesh to eat?” So Jesus said to them, “I assure you: unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you do not have life in yourselves” (John 6: 51, 52, 53).

Jesus was talking about spiritual food. The Pharisee knew about the miracle of Manna in the wilderness; but miraculous though that was it was still only physical food. They had no idea what spiritual food was. It hadn't been on their menus! So they took him literally and thought he was talking about cannibalism!

## His Parents – My Father's House

“Why were you searching for me?” he asked. “Didn't you know I had to be in my Father's house?” But they did not understand what he was saying to them (Luke 2:49, 50).

Mary was Jesus' mother and Joseph his adopted father. They *naturally* thought of an earthly father, but Jesus was speaking about his Father in heaven. At this stage Joseph and Mary did not know God as their Father; or if they did, they had no understanding of it. This could only come through the work of the Holy Spirit. Paul did understand this and wrote: “You have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’” (Rom 8:15).

## The Disciples – the Yeast of the Pharisees

“Be careful,” Jesus said to them. “Be on your guard against the yeast (leaven) of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” They discussed this among themselves and said, “It is because we didn't bring any bread” (Matthew 16: 6, 7).

Jesus was speaking about the doctrine of the Pharisees, but the disciples thought that when he said yeast he meant yeast! The Pharisees seemed so right in what they taught. Jesus even said: “The scribes and the Pharisees are seated in the chair of Moses. Therefore do whatever they tell you, and observe it” (Matt 23: 2). How could anything be wrong with such expert expositors of the Scriptures? The simple fishermen of Galilee probably thought the Pharisees knew everything. Later on, no doubt, they changed their minds.

## The Answer

Nicodemus, The Woman of Samaria, the Jews, his Parents, even his disciples, no one seemed able to understand what Jesus was talking about. Jesus obviously knew this, and knew also that there was no human solution to the problem; but there were divine solutions: the New Birth and the Holy Spirit! He spent most of his last evening on earth with his disciples telling them about the coming of the Holy Spirit. “When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth. For He will not speak on His own, but He will speak whatever He hears. He will also declare to you what is to come. He will glorify Me, because He will take from what is Mine and declare it to you. Everything the Father has is Mine. This is why I told you that He takes from what is Mine and will declare it to you.” (John 16:12-15.)

Did the disciples at last understand what he was saying to them? No; not yet. They could not understand clearly about the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit had not yet come!

The real change in the disciples began on the day of Pentecost. From then on they could see and enter the kingdom of heaven. They became able to drink living water. They could eat the bread of life. They had received the spirit of sonship by which they could know God as Father, and call him Abba as Jesus had done. Their eyes were now opened to see a whole realm in the spirit which before had been hidden from them. Now at last they began to understand all that Jesus had said to them. No doubt they said to one another: “Oh that's what he meant by this” and “Oh now I see what he meant by that”.

Paul spoke of the same experience: “But as it is written: What eye did not see and ear did not hear, and what never entered the human mind — God prepared this for those who love Him. Now God has revealed these things to us by the Spirit, for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God” (1 Cor 2: 9, 10).

## What about Now?

Well, what is the situation now, almost 2000 years on? Do we now all understand what Jesus said? Have centuries of theological seminaries, Bible colleges and much study and research made everything clear? The multitude of denominations and diverse teachings of Christendom are abundant evidence