

An Open Understanding

1 Corinthians 2:10-16; Luke 24:45

Third Sunday of Easter April 14, 2024

First Congregational Church of Marshalltown, Iowa

- Introduction: Sheldon, come home

There's an old story about a lady from the East Coast of the United States, who traveled to the farthest reaches of Tibet and there came to a remote monastery. She inquired about having a conversation with the chief monk and was told to wait at the gate. This she did for some time until one of the novices came and invited her in. He told her that she could stay as a guest for two days, at the end of which she would have a brief audience with the chief monk, who spends almost all of his time in deep meditation. There she would be allowed to say three words to him and await his response. Her two-day wait gave her time to consider what she wanted to ask of the person of great insight and wisdom. She agreed and patiently awaited her two days. Finally, it came time to be ushered into his presence as he sat on a pile of cushions deep in thought. The monks had the lady from the East Coast sit on another pile of cushions, facing the chief monk and they instructed her to wait patiently until the chief monk opened his eyes and looked at her. Then she could say her three-word petition. Finally, after some time, the chief monk stirred and slowly opened his eyes to gaze upon her. At that moment she leaned forward, looked intently into his eyes and said, "Sheldon, come home." Sheldon may have traveled half-way around the world to gain wisdom and spiritual insight, but all he really needed to see the world through God's eyes was waiting for him at home. That source of all wisdom is the Holy Spirit, and you do not need to travel anywhere to meet him. Today I want to reflect on the person of the Spirit who reveals mysteries and prepares us to meet wisdom that we would never gain any other way.

- Set the Stage

Jesus in Luke 24:45 and Paul in 1 Corinthians.

In order to set the stage, let's look at a passage at the end of Luke's Gospel. Jesus appears to His disciples again and they are still in shock. During His explanation that they death and resurrection were planned from long ago, Luke adds a telling piece of explanation. In verse 24 he wrote that Jesus opened their understanding that they might comprehend the Scriptures. This, and other verses like it, indicate that understanding Scripture is not a matter of intellect but of the intervention/inspiration of God. They would have never understood what He said until He opened their understanding. The same is true today.

The Apostle Paul unfolds this doctrine further in 1 Corinthians 2. He begins by maintaining that his essential message is simple: Christ and Christ crucified. He points out that the "rulers of this age," either human or demonic, did not understand the plan of the Father in the midst of our Savior's crucifixion and death or they never would have done what they did. Then he quotes Isaiah 64:4, pointing out that God has prepared things for the people who love Him that we have never dreamed. Here's what he wrote: "eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him." Not only have we no idea what He has for us, but we would never imagine if not revealed to us.

- Main Point

The Holy Spirit reveals the deep things of God (1 Corinthians 2:10)

And here we come to the main point. Verse ten tells us "But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God." The "deep things" are mysteries that cannot be discovered. They are revealed only and they are revealed, at least in part, in Scripture. It speaks to the divine nature of Scripture but also to the need of the Spirit to bring inspiration, that we cannot understand until the Spirit reveals truth to us. The word "reveal" means literally "to remove the lid" and this influences our view of Scripture. We find in this book truth that only God can reveal and truth that requires the Holy Spirit to understand. It is not a matter of intellect.

- Application

Approach the Bible with prayer and expectation.

Here's the application. Remember that the application can be "this is what you should do", but often it is "this is how you should pray", or "this is what God is like." Perhaps the application should be "approach the Bible with much prayer and also with anticipation." Approach the Bible with the idea that you can learn something that will change your view of life, and thus change your life entirely. I remember one detail from Luke's Gospel that he stayed with me for all of my life. Luke 12:35-48 contains our Lord's parable of the faithful and evil servants, with an application that we are to live our lives in readiness, always prepared to face the Lord. Verse 37 has something about the future of the faithful Christian that I would have never dreamed of if I had not read it in Scripture. It reads: "Blessed are those servants whom the master, when he comes, will find watching. Assuredly, I say to you that he will gird himself and have them sit down to eat, and will come and serve them." Every month we celebrate the Sacrament of Communion as prefiguring the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, the great feast in the Kingdom of God that is the essence of heaven. I can envision a beautiful, ornate, sumptuous feast. I cannot image being seated at table with the Lord Jesus being my waiter, yet here it is. I still look this passage up from time to time and muse over it. I would have never imagined.

- Conclusion

Scripture requires an open understanding, and by that I mean a mind opened by the Holy Spirit for the Scripture is spiritual and understanding is not a matter of intellect. In it we find the deep things of God, searched by the Holy Spirit and revealed to us. In it we find truth about God, about God's plans for the ages and the place of our lives in this plan. We will be wise to always approach the Scriptures with prayer and expectation.

