

The following is a rough transcript, not in its final form and may be updated.

Do You Believe In Jesus?

John 2:18-22

Intro: If you were to take a poll of Bible scholars and teachers and ask what they considered to be their greatest spiritual need, you'd probably find a consensus in their responses; at least from among the best of them. Most would likely identify their greatest spiritual need as a *better understanding of God's Word*. This may come as a surprise because these people seem to eat, drink and sleep the Bible. But, people who know the Bible best have discovered 2 undeniable truths: 1) they've only begun to scratch the surface and 2) *knowing the Bible better* means they will *know God better*. One Bible teacher responded this way, "I know enough of the Bible to know how much more there is to know. And I know that all knowledge of God depends upon such knowledge. Sometimes I feel like a man who has been running for a long distance—chest heaving, lungs pulling for more oxygen." This answer is telling because it acknowledges one of the great underlying principles of Christianity. Namely, that *no one ever understands spiritual truths apart from the Bible* and as a result, *no one* can come to know God or His will by any *other* means.

Of course, that certainly doesn't stop people from trying! Some think they can discover more about God thru human reason. But, human reason is a *dead end* (spiritually). Truth is; it's always been those "*great minds*" who exercised their powers of reason *apart from* the Word of God that produce the darkest *heresies*. That's why heresies are so acceptable to so many: because they're always so *rational* and *reasonable* but, sadly, they're also always *wrong*!

Some think they can discover God by listening to a so-called "*inner voice*," (navel-gazers: *excessive interest in oneself*) but, the voice they hear is often nothing more than an expression of their own inner desires. A great many folk think that spiritual truths can be *verified* by supernatural events or miracles. But the Bible teaches us that even miracles will not lead people to *understand* & *receive* God's truth unless they are also *illuminated by the Bible*. It's why Jesus said, "*If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded tho one rise from the dead*" (Luke 16:31). The truth is clear: *there is no knowledge of God apart from Jesus*

Christ and there is no knowledge of Jesus Christ *apart* from a knowledge of the Bible. This truth is clearly illustrated in our text today.

18- the Jews – These weren't just random Jews that happen to pass by, these would be full-fledged members of the **religious establishment** that were questioning Him; most likely, the temple authorities (**chief priests, scribes, elders**). It was **logical** for the religious leaders to ask Jesus to reveal the source of His authority. Anyone who dared to drive out the merchants from the temple courts **claimed** to have the **authority** to do so. The Jews wanted to know if Jesus really had this authority. Truth is, as corrupt as they were, these men were still the **guardians** of the Jewish faith and they had the responsibility and the right to test any and all new prophets who showed up on the scene.

Now, while a question of authority was **appropriate**, their demand for a **sign** was completely **misguided!** Jesus had just performed a great sign by throwing all the merchants and money changers out of the temple courts. It was a direct fulfillment of the essence of **Mal 3:1-3** "**the Lord...will come suddenly to His temple...He will purify...**" It also brought to mind **Ps 69:9**, "**Zeal for your house has eaten me up.**" **The Jews** demanded a sign but what sign could have been more revealing than what they had just witnessed? How could these **religious** leaders be so blind to this?

Despite the OT passages and their obvious fulfillment, **the Jews failed** to see **the hand of God** in Jesus' actions because they **weren't thinking scripturally**, they were too busy **feeling threatened** by what Jesus had done. They had already received one very dramatic sign, plus all the other miraculous signs Jesus performed during that Passover feast (**v23**) but they rejected all these things and insisted (demanded) Jesus give them something more.

What further sign could Jesus give? Many times during His ministry, the religious authorities would demand a sign from Jesus to prove either His authority or His authenticity. Jesus would always refuse to offer them anything **except** the sign of Jonah: **death, burial and resurrection (drowning, consumption and regurgitation)**. This was the only sign Jesus was willing to offer them then and in essence, it's the only sign He offers them now.

19- temple – Jesus uses the image of the temple to convey the truth about

His own death and the resurrection that was to follow it. This was the only sign He could offer them but since they **refused** to evaluate His actions through the perspective of Scripture, they would eventually reject this sign also. In fact, they were well on their way to it...

20-22- 46 yrs – Jesus would have offended them less if He had walked up and spit in their faces. The temple was the most important element of the Jewish faith because Jehovah was supposed to dwell in it. All of the ceremonies and sacrifices of the Jewish religion were centered in the temple. It was the focal point of all Judaism. When He suggests that their precious edifice would be destroyed, their angry response is understandable. “**But He’s talking about His body, not the temple.**” True, but, if Jesus’ **body** is the temple, then the Jewish temple is **rendered obsolete**. So, no matter how you take it, Jesus’ statement is literally a prediction of the end of the Jewish religious system. I’m sure the religious leaders hadn’t picked up on that part of His comment but let’s be clear: **at this time no one understood** what Jesus was saying (**leaders, disciples, people**). But here’s the difference: the rulers would **never** understand it while the disciples would **only begin** to understand it **after** the fact and **in light of biblical revelation**.

Why were they so far from the truth? Why couldn’t they see God’s hand in this? The reaction of **the Jews** here is a vivid example of **men failing to understand spiritual things because their minds haven’t been illuminated by Scripture**. The point being made here is: every attempt to do so will **always result in seeing** things **only** on the **physical level**.

Let me illustrate it this way. Most of us understand at least the concept of a slot machine. A player drops in a coin then pulls a lever on the side. When this is done, wheels with various pictures begin to spin with a whirring sound and then they stop one after another to show various combinations of pictures. These machines have a common, easily-recognizable sound: 1st the whirring, then the click, click, click as the wheels stop spinning in turn. If certain combinations of pictures appear in the display, the player gets some money back. Most of the time, nothing happens.

If the player is a gambler, he puts in more money, hears the same sounds (**whirr, 3 clicks**) & nothing happens again.

This is exactly what happened when Jesus spoke words of spiritual truth. In fact, thru-out John’s Gospel, people are constantly misunderstanding

spiritual truth and then interpreting it in material or physical terms. Take Nicodemus in the very next chapter. He is **a ruler of the Jews** (religious) who recognizes Jesus as **a teacher who came from God**. Yet, Jesus' 1st comment to him was, "**unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.**" That was a coin of spiritual truth being dropped into Nicodemus' mind. You can almost hear the wheels turning as he tries to process this nugget of truth. Then he asks, "**How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a 2nd time into his mother's womb...**" What? The concept, as he states it, is utterly ridiculous. Jesus is referring to **the new life received by faith**, while Nicodemus only thinks about human birth and all it entails. In other words – Nic came up with blank!

Same thing happens in **ch4**. Jesus meets a woman at the well and in the course of their conversation; He offers to satisfy her **spiritual thirst** once and for all. Jesus was pitching but she wasn't catching. All she was thinking of was water, wells and buckets. Just like Nicodemus – her wheels were spinning but she didn't register a win. It's not just the unchurched that had this problem either. While Jesus was talking with the woman, His disciples were in town buying lunch. When they got back, they urged Him to eat but He said, "**I have food to eat of which you do not know.**" Did they take this as Jesus being sustained by doing the Father's work? No, the wheels spun but came up blank.

This is what happens **when people try to process spiritual truth with their own human ability**. It's what happens in our text. Jesus talks about destroying the temple and raising it up in 3 days and the religious rulers didn't even have the wisdom to ask, "**What exactly are you referring to?**" Instead, they jumped to **fleshly, physical** conclusions.

So, no one understood what Jesus was saying when He 1st said it because no one looked at it from the perspective of Scripture. But, the Jewish rulers never did understand Jesus' comments in spite of other signs and miracles. Why?

1) The Jewish leaders hadn't been listening to Scripture. Because of this, **they weren't ready to listen to Jesus either.** **God speaks to men thru His word.** But, because they wouldn't hear Him there, they couldn't hear Him when He spoke to them face-to-face. The rulers weren't really asking Jesus for a sign; they were just expressing their

anger over His actions. They wanted to know what **possible justification** He could have for driving the merchants and money changers out of their temple, especially since they had already told them they had a right to be there.

People are still like this with God today; not just in the world but in the church as well! **God speaks, but many don't really listen.** One reason for this is that they're **so invested in their own outlook and way of doing things that they're secretly angry with God for not conforming to *their* plans.** Is that you? If so, you must **1st forget your anger** and then **learn to see things from God's perspective.** **God's point of view—the only valid one—is revealed to us in Scripture.**

2) They **didn't want to hear** what Jesus was saying. His reference to the destruction of the temple illustrated His own death and resurrection but it also pointed to eventual passing of the temple & the worship conducted there. The implication was that the ceremonial worship of the Jews would be replaced with a spiritual worship after His work was completed. That's exactly what happened: The temple reconstruction was started by Herod around **20 B.C.** It was now around **A.D. 26**, meaning the temple had been under construction for **46 yrs.** It would be **another 37 yrs** before the details were finished (around **A.D. 63**); **then 7 yrs later the whole thing was destroyed by the Romans.**

If there was anything **these leaders did not want to hear, it was that.** And since they weren't ready to hear what Jesus 1st had to say to them, they weren't ready to listen to this either. Maybe this is true of you. When we hear from **God**, He **always starts by pointing out our need of Him.** He shows us our sin and allows us to see a bit of our own rebellious heart. Maybe you're afraid He's doing that so you refuse to listen. **You won't read or study your Bible.** If that's the case for you, then you must realize that **all good cures begin with an accurate diagnosis.** You must allow God to lead you from a recognition of your need to that which satisfies it completely. It's only found in Him!

3) People refuse to believe in Christ because their **minds are filled with wrong ideas from this world.** Nearly every idea of this world is directly opposed to the principles and truths revealed in Scripture. So, if our minds are filled with worldly ideas, like the religious leaders in our text – we will not

hear Jesus! Spiritual truths from the Bible will seem **foolish** or **incomprehensible** to us. We must allow God to transform us by following Paul's exhortation in **II Cor 10:5**. Some of the fiercest battles you'll have in Christ will be in your mind & your strongest opponent will be your flesh.

The text is not all negative. It mostly deals with the rulers who refused to listen to God's word & thus, were unable to hear God's Son. But these aren't the only ones in the story. There were also the disciples; just a handful of them; mostly fishermen; uneducated by the standards of the times. They had no reputation in the eyes of the world and no fame in Jerusalem, but they knew the Scriptures a little bit. More importantly, they began to interpret the events that were happening around them in the light of the Scriptures that they knew.

The great contrast in this text is the attitude of the religious leaders vs. the attitude of the disciples. The rulers were angry, offended and fit to be tied at the actions of Jesus, while the disciples were encouraged and their faith was strengthened thru all this simply because **they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus spoke** (22b). As Jesus' actions and ministry continued to fulfill the promises and prophecies found OT Scripture, their confidence in His ability to fulfill the promises and prophecies He was giving them now grew in direct proportion. The rulers were angry, confused and literally without hope while the disciples were excited, encouraged and filled with hope. All of this was based solely on the emphasis and importance each group placed on the revelation of God in His Word.

How does this apply to us? **Do we approach the various events and realities of our lives scripturally as God desires us to?** Or are we still trying to puzzle out God's truth with your own weak faculties of reasoning? The Bible tells us that **we will only advance spiritually** and that **we will only hear God's voice** to the degree that **we faithfully and consistently approach Him through the pages of His book**. Are we doing this? This will ultimately determine the attitude, the atmosphere of our Christian walk, our spiritual lives.

Maybe you're here today and haven't understood anything I've said. You may feel like I owe you an apology but the truth is, there's a good reason for it. See, you will never be able to understand the things of God until you first accept the reality of God into your heart and life. The Apostle Paul tells us in **I Cor 2:14** that it's impossible for a regular person to understand the things

of God because they are spiritually discerned. That means you must have the Holy Spirit of God living within you to guide you thru and reveal the meaning of His word to you. Before you can ever come to know the Scriptures, you must first come to know the Author of them. He certainly wants to be part of your life. 😊