**THE FRUSTRATION OF UNBELIEF**

**(Matthew 16:1-12)**

Do you ever have bad days? Do you ever think you would have been better off had you stayed in bed? I recently read some quotes concerning when you know it is a bad day.

You know it is going to be a bad day when:

* You have to hitch hike to the bank to make your car payment.
* Your secretary tells you the FBI is on line 1, the DA is on line 2, and CBS is on line 3.
* The pest exterminator crawls under your house and never comes out.
* Your wife takes the dog on vacation and leaves you at the kennel.
* You dig around in your purse for your iPhone, while you’re talking on it.
* You try to pull on the pair of pants that fit you last spring, but they don’t go above your knees.
* Your calendar says, “Colonoscopy tomorrow- Start Prep.”
* Your twin sister forgets your birthday.
* You call your wife and tell her that you would like to eat out tonight and when you get home there is a sandwich on the front porch.
* You wake up and discover your waterbed broke and then realize you don't have a waterbed.

Often, we allow the people around us to determine if we are going to have a good day or a bad day.

Don’t look at your spouse or around the room at someone else, and don’t point, but let me ask you: Do you ever get annoyed with people? Do some people frustrate you? Do you ever get irritated at people? Do you find that some folks just rub you the wrong way? Are there some people, who when you are around them, your blood pressure goes up? What is it about them that irritates you?

What is it? Is it the way they act? Is it the way they speak or how they don’t quit talking? Is it the way they drive?

Do you think Jesus ever got irritated with people? I think He did, but I also think that what frustrated Him may not be what most frustrates you and me? We find a clear indication of what upset Jesus in Matthew 16:1-12.

Mark also tells this story in his gospel, but he includes a tidbit of information that Matthew omitted. In Mark 8:12 we read of Jesus’ reaction when the Pharisees came to Him asking for a sign. That wanted Him to do some kind of miracle in their presence to give evidence that He had been sent by God. We read, “And He sighed deeply in His spirit.”

I believe it was a sigh of frustration and irritation. *Today’s English Version* reads, “But Jesus gave a deep groan.”

Do you ever . . . **sigh, groan, roll your eyes, shake your head,** and **throw up your hands** because you get frustrated and irritated with people?

Jesus can relate. We are going to look at the two groups who frustrate Jesus the most. We are also going to ask if we ever get frustrated with ourselves and what we should do about it.

1. **JESUS IS FRUSTRATED BY THE UNBELIEF OF RELIGIOUS FOLK.**

Matthew tells us why the Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus in 16:1. They didn’t come to learn from Jesus. They didn’t come with an open mind. They didn’t come with the intent of understanding Him better. They didn’t even come to honestly share their concerns. They came to test Him. They wanted to ensnare Jesus. They wanted to trip Him up so they would have cause to bring charges against Him.

It is interesting that a delegation from both the Pharisees and the Sadducees came to together. These two groups were poles apart from one another much like hard right Republicans and far left Democrats. They rarely agreed on anything. Because their views were so divergent, they didn’t care much for one another. To find them cooperating on anything was strange, to say the least.

The Greek scholar A.T. Robertson observed, “Hate makes strange bedfellows. They [these two groups] hated Jesus more than they did each other.” As a result, they combined forces to see what they could do in their common goal of ridding themselves of Jesus.

They asked Jesus to do a sign from heaven, not the heaven where God lives but the heavens. They were asking for a meteorological sign such as stopping the course of the sun or darkening the moon or bringing about a clap of thunder on a clear day.

In His response, Jesus uses meteorology to bring a counter charge against them. Look at vv. 2-3. Before the days of 24-hour news, meteorologists on all of the local TV stations, and weather aps on your smart phones, farmers had to learn how to predict the weather. Old-timers handed down folk wisdom to help you know what the weather was going to do based on what you could readily see.

One of the most well-known sayings was, “Red sky at night, sailor’s delight. Red sky in the morning, sailor’s warning.”

The truth of this saying was known back in Jesus’ day, and Jesus uses it to make a point. He is saying, “You know the signs in the sky, but you are clueless in regard to the signs of the times.” Jesus denies their request for a sign. He has already worked a multitude of miracles and signs, but the religious leaders dismissed them, explained them away, or ignored them altogether.

What had already happened was ample testimony to the fact that God was at work among them, but they willingly suppressed the truth. That is a dangerous thing to do.

Look at v. 4. Jesus isn’t speaking on a physical level. He is communicating on a spiritual level. These religious leaders were guilty of spiritual adultery.

The sign of Jonah had to do with the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. Just a Jonah was as good as dead while he was in the belly of the great fish three days and nights, Jesus will be literally dead buried in the earth. Just as Jonah was spit out on the land and raised from the dead in a sense, Jesus will actually come back to life.

There is no greater sign that Jesus is the Son of God and the Savior of all than the fact that He came back to life. He was given a resurrection body.

After having upbraided them, Jesus left. Notice that Jesus did not stick around and argue with the delegation. There is little point in arguing for the truth of the gospel. That would be like trying to protect a lion. A lion doesn’t need your protection. Just let him loose.

The gospel doesn’t need you to defend it; just proclaim it. Jesus said, “Let your light shine.” He didn’t say, “Defend the superiority of your light.” Shining your light is enough. Proclaiming the gospel is enough. Nothing will be won by arguing for the truthfulness of your position. Just plant the seed rather than engaging in a debate as to whether your seed is worthwhile.  
 Paul wrote that the gospel is the power of God unto salvation. God’s power resides in the gospel. His power is not found in your arguments for the validity of the gospel.

I find no evidence that Jesus was ever irritated with irreligious people. Jesus was not frustrated by the sinners and the tax collectors, by the prostitutes and the cheats. They didn’t try to justify themselves by dragging Him down.

I want you to notice how Jesus was different from the Sadducees and different from the Pharisees. The Sadducees compromised with the Roman culture that was around them. They participated in and acclimated to the ways of the Romans around them. They may not have believed what they believed, but in their minds, it was perfectly fine to believe one way and behave another.

The Pharisees were completely different. Instead of being drawn in by the culture around them, they sought to withdraw from the culture. The word Pharisee means separate. They were separatists. They wanted to have nothing or at least as little to do as possible with the culture around them.

John Stott once preached a sermon entitled, “Keeping the Right Company.” He looked at the passage in Mark 2 where Jesus calls Matthew or Levi to become His disciple. Matthew had been a tax collector. He throws a party for Jesus and invites all of his tax collector friends. Jesus ate with and fellowshipped tax collectors and sinners.

The Pharisees saw that and had a cow. They couldn’t believe that a good man who claimed to represent God would stoop to spend time with riff raff like that. Jesus said, “Hey, a doctor doesn’t call on the well; He visits those who are sick.”

Commenting on this, Stott said:

As a doctor spends his time with the sick not because he likes sickness nor because he approves of being sick (still less because he wants to perpetuate disease in the world), but because he is dedicated to healing. Just so, Jesus mixed with tax collectors and sinners—and still does—not because He likes their ways or approves of them (still less because He wants to encourage and promote sin in the world), but because He came into the world to save them. He is the physician of our souls.

Christianity, Jesus taught here, is a rescue religion. The doctor has no relevance for those who are well.

He went on to say:

So, the way of Jesus was poles apart from the Pharisees’. The Pharisees’ philosophy was withdrawal. Jesus’ philosophy was involvement. The Pharisees’ philosophy was insulation from the world. Jesus’ philosophy was identification with the world. And the Holy Spirit, whose wonderful coming we celebrate today, has the very same nature. He is God. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have the same nature, and it is a nature that is given to outreach. In other words, love. Reaching out in love. God is love. The Father is love. The Son is love. The Spirit is love. Reaching out in love to those who need to be loved and to be rescued.

If we are filled with the Holy Spirit, we are going to reach out. Stott quoted William Temple who said, “Nobody can be indwelt by the Spirit of God and keep that Spirit to himself. Where the Spirit is, He flows forth. And where there is no flowing forth, He is not there.”

You can’t be a Pharisee and be a Spirit-filled believer. In the closing words of his sermon, Stott said:

Let us repent of Pharisaic Christianity . . . and let us determine to follow Jesus like his apostle Matthew, to make friends with unbelievers, to love them, and to seek to introduce them to Christ.

1. **JESUS IS FRUSTRATED BY THE UNBELIEF OF HIS FOLLOWERS.**

We who follow Jesus can’t pretend we have it all together. At times, Jesus was just as frustrated with His disciples as He was with the religious elite, and it was often for the same reason—lack of faith. Look at vv. 5-7.

Here we see that Jesus and His disciples weren’t on the same wave length. He was using spiritual language, and they were thinking on a physical level. When they got to the other side of the lake, they remembered they have forgotten to bring bread with them. Mark said all they had was one loaf, but that wouldn’t go very far among 13 men.

Jesus was still thinking about the recent conversation he had with the delegation of religious leaders; so, He cautioned His disciples, “Watch out! Don’t be led astray by the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

Apparently, the disciples think that Jesus is criticizing them for not bringing enough bread.

Do you ever misinterpret what Jesus is trying to say to you? I think many believers mistakenly think that God is mad at them, and He is just waiting for them to get out of line so He can whack them. Many Christians are legalists, and they think that God is all about laws and rules and they have to earn His approval by behaving themselves and keeping all of the religious rules.

This past week I was reading from Galatians 3. Look at the first six verses of that chapter. Paul used the phrase “hearing with faith” twice. That is what God is look for and what God blesses.

Let’s ask God to help us to understand what He means instead of just assuming that we do.

Jesus does criticize the disciples for their lack of faith. Look at vv. 8-11. In v. 12 we see that the disciples finally get what Jesus meant.

If Jesus can feed 5000 plus with five loaves of bread and two fish, and if He can feed 4000 plus with seven loaves of bread and a few fish, surely Jesus can take care of Himself and 12 men with one loaf of bread.

Are you relying on Jesus to take care of you?

I came across a story about a preacher who was on a mission trip to Kenya. He met with a group of poor believers, and from them he learned about trusting God. I’ll let him tell the story:

One Sunday I was visiting one of Africa’s largest slums, the massive Kibera slum of Nairobi, Kenya. The conditions were simply inhumane. People lived in shacks constructed out of cardboard boxes. Foul smells gushed out of open ditches carrying human and animal excrement …. I thought to myself, This place is completely God-forsaken.

Then to my amazement, right there among the dung, I heard the sound of a familiar hymn …. Every Sunday, thirty slum dwellers crammed into this ten-by-twenty foot “sanctuary” to worship [God]. The church was made out of cardboard boxes that had been opened up and stapled to studs. It wasn’t pretty, but it was a church made up of some of the poorest people on earth.

I was immediately asked to preach the sermon. I quickly jotted down some notes and was looking forward to teaching this congregation [about the sovereignty of God]. But before the sermon began, I listened as some of the poorest people on the planet cried out to God: “Jehovah Jireh, please heal my son, as he is going blind.” “Merciful Lord, please protect me when I go home today, for my husband always beats me.” “Sovereign King, please provide my children with enough food today, as they are hungry.”

As I listened to their heartfelt prayers, I thought about my ample salary, my life insurance policy, my health insurance policy, my two cars, my house, etc. I realized that I do not really trust in God’s sovereignty on a daily basis. I have buffers in place to shield me from most economic shocks. I realized that when these folks pray “Give us this day our daily bread” their minds don’t wander as mine so often does. I realized that these slum dwellers were trusting in God’s sovereignty just to get them through the day, and they had a far deeper intimacy with God than I probably will ever have in my entire life.

At the beginning of the message, I asked you if you ever get irritated with people. Let me be more specific, do you ever get irritated or frustrated with yourself? What is it about yourself that you find frustrating? Is it that you can’t stay on your diet, that you don’t have the discipline to exercise, or that you can’t seem to save money? Is it your temper? Let me suggest what should most frustrate us.

1. **WE SHOULD BE FRUSTRATED BY THE FREQUENCY OF OUR**

**UNBELIEF.**

The fact is that you and I disbelieve God with amazing regularity. It is not that we fail to recognize that Jesus is the Son of God. It is not that we fail trust Jesus to forgive us of our sin and save our souls.

Our unbelief is rooted more in failing to trust God to take care of us. We are saved by faith, but we often fail to live by faith. The only alternative to living by faith is living by the flesh. We try to take care of ourselves. We attempt to make things happen by our own power. We struggle to figure things out on our own, and thus, we rely on our own wisdom.

If you are having a difficult time determining just where you are afflicted by unbelief, ask yourself this question, “What do I fear?” If you can identify what you fear and when you are fearful, you can locate your areas of unbelief. It is abundantly clear that fear and faith cannot occupy the same space. They are mutually exclusive. Where fear is present, faith is absent, and where faith is present, fear is absent.

In what areas of your life are you facing fear? Is it in financial matters? If you are hesitant to give sacrificially to support the church and the Lord’s work, you are living by fear rather than by faith.

If you are silent when opportunities come your way to share the good news of Christ, you are being fearful rather than faithful.

If you are fearful about what the future holds, you are not trusting the wisdom, power, and goodness of God.

I came across a devotional article written by Bonnie McKernan who lives in Virginia. The title of the devotional was, “Lord, Help My Daily Unbelief.” She wrote:

When my mind is consumed with my bank account, I’m believing that money provides my security rather than my Savior. When I yell at my children for leaving a mess I need to clean, I’m believing that my comfort comes from an orderly house rather than from the God of all comfort. When I become despondent over an uncertain future and lack of stability, I’m failing to believe that I am merely a pilgrim and this is not my home.

Every hour that goes by that I fail to pray and cry out to God is an hour that I’m telling him, “It’s okay, I got this.” And then I hypocritically wonder how I got here.

Bonnie devotional is based on the passage in Mark 9 when a father brings his son to Jesus. The man’s son is demon-possessed. The disciples have been unable to cast out the demons from the boy. The father asks Jesus to help the boy, “if you can.” Jesus replies, “If you can! All things are possible for one who believes” (Mark 9:23).

Mark tells us in the next verse, “Immediately, the father of the child cried out and said, ‘I believe; help my unbelief.’” (Mark 9:24).

That’s where most of us are today. We believe, but there are large pockets in our lives where we need the Lord’s help to turn our unbelief into belief.

Bonnie concludes her devotional with these words:

Prayer is medicine for unbelief. When belief and unbelief collide, let us turn to the one our belief comes from, the source and object of our faith. Personal contact with Jesus our Savior is how we drive away unbelief. Seek his face. Pray desperately and expectantly — the belief we do have is the only means of vanquishing the enemies of our peace. Let your weak faith cling to our mighty God. Repent and pray for deliverance from unbelief even before praying for deliverance from your circumstances.

I invite you right now, where you are seated, to ask the Lord to help your unbelief. If you are frustrated by your own lack of faith, and we all should, ask Jesus to replace your unbelief with strong trust in Him.