

NewportNaz

Belong...

Believe...

Become...

May 6th, 2012

A Lifetime On Milk

Who wants to grow up? Childhood is so much easier!

Hebrews 5:11-14

I confess this morning, ashamedly, I love the movie 'Dumb and Dumber'. I have watched it countless times. And I can't help but wonder if God, as he watches us live, is watching "Dumb and Dumber" over and over again. God's patience toward us is truly stunning at times. This morning we want to explore why God has to watch "Dumb and Dumber" so often as God watches over the lives we choose to live, day-after-day, month-after-month, year-after-year, decade-after-decade...

1) The dilemma of 'hard to explain', 'hard of hearing' and 'childish' reactions.

I taught adults in a college setting for over 20 years, almost all of whom were studying to be pastors or educators in Christian Churches. I never could get used to the fact that so many of them came into class with the expectation, that learning the things of God should be simple, easy even. As they would often say to me, "I'm just not being fed in this class (sermon)". And that always raises the question, "Is it the teacher, the material or the listener that is the problem." I suspect it might be a little of all three...

◆ Why is it hard to explain?: Is it ok to acknowledge how tired I grow of hearing folks suggest the acronym KISS (Keep It Simple Stupid) when discussing the principles of God, as if God insists, like so many modern Newspapers and magazines, that no concept beyond the level of a 6th grader could be addressed to the masses, or in God's Church. Don't you fatigue of people insisting that we think like 6th graders (no offense meant to those of you in 6th grade)? Let's begin this morning by affirming that many things about the Kingdom of God are 'hard' to understand, and even more difficult to figure out how to implement in our day-to-day lives.

◆ Dull (vωθροί) of hearing: This is the only instance in the NT where this word is used. It simply means 'sluggish' or 'obtuse'. More importantly, is the understanding that the condition of 'sluggishness' did not always exist (this is critical to understand). It has developed as the follower has become less and less responsive to that which has previously been understood. Hence, you become 'dull' to what God is attempting to teach you.

◆ “...is a child” (ναῖος): The idea here is metaphorical, suggesting not that these folks are actually children, rather, that in spite of their biological age, well into adulthood, they continue to ‘think’ and ‘act’ (actually by not thinking nor acting out), like children¹.

II) So what leads to a lifetime of childishness (hard hearing)?

Having raised 2, and now in the process of number 3, I have discovered that children (like many adults) just don't like to be made uncomfortable, even if there is a payoff later on. Hence, they get stuck on the path of ‘easy’ and never move toward ‘adult’ living, especially in relationship to the Christian Faith. Hence, several key things never take place.

◆ Ideas never get embraced: Listening to an idea (sermon) is all well and nice, but unless the idea is embraced, and then personalized for your own ‘sitz-en-laben’, the ‘idea’ simply joins the countless minions of other ideas stored away in the recesses of your mind, never to be deployed in the real world.

◆ Ideas never get applied (unskilled/): Sooner or later the concepts and principles of the Word of God have to be applied to real-life scenarios. And this is the important part to grasp, most early attempts will not come out in a skilled fashion. Hence, like the ‘sheetrock’ demonstration this morning, only those who have actually practiced something, a lot, will acquire the skill to perform the task in a satisfactory manner.

◆ Ideas never get taught (ought to be teachers/διδασκαλοι): The term always suggests two dimensions. The first is the ‘theory’ of a thing. The second is the practical application of a thing. Hence, a teacher in the NT is always a person who can not only explain a thing, but also can ‘live the thing’ in a practical and useful manner. More to the point, the model of the NT is that all persons will become teachers. But you cannot teach until you have first put into practice...

III) So what makes for ‘maturity’ in a child of God?

Several key dimensions for adulthood are highlighted for us to consider and each plays a critical role in our development.

◆ Able to eat solid food²: The concept of solid food is clearly designated as that which is beyond the ‘basic principles’ of the oracles of God. Case in point here could be. Basis principle: Jesus is tempted in every respect as we are. Advanced principle: What would the temptations that Jesus faced look like? Did he have feelings of attraction like I do? Did he want to over eat like I do? Etc...

◆ Skilled in the ‘word of righteousness’: Here again we discover the double layer of meaning associated with both the concept of ‘teacher’ and ‘skilled’. The first simply suggests that one is proficient in the ‘knowledge base of scripture’. But just as important, is the idea of proficiency in application. Both must be present in order for ‘skill’ to be present.

◆ Powers of discernment (αίσθησις): Oh my is this last tidbit critical for anyone who has any aspirations toward maturity. Notice that only the mature will be able to ‘discern’ or ‘distinguish’ good from evil. Hence, the external of a thing or scenarios will not readily convey whether a thing is good or evil. Good and evil often look the same. Consider how a ‘prayer request’ can look innocent enough, “Please pray for Tom who is having an affair”. Many of us have been on the receiving end of that request, discerning that the intent was not prayer, but to maim. Hence, the power of discernment always reflects two critical dimensions:

◆ Intellectual understanding: Once again we see the utter importance of inputting the principles of God’s Word. It is those principles that lay the foundation upon which ‘insight’ can rest or function. Rarely, if ever, will spiritual discernment come to those who have not first laid the critical foundation of the principles of the Word of God.

◆ Insight into the true meaning of a thing: This ‘aha’ moment, or ‘spiritual insight’ provides the ability to see behind a ‘thing’. It is that moment in which the mature child of the King is able to ‘understand’ the actual meaning behind what is actually seen.

◆ Trained (γεγυνασμενα)³ by constant practice: Here in lies the fundamental issue for most of us. We are simply unwilling to practice long enough in order to become skillful in the ‘trades’ of the faith. The emphasis here is on the idea of ‘constant’ or continual practice which a ‘skill’ or ability is acquired. But it also raises the question of when a ‘skill’ has arrived a level of ‘quality’ that is suitable for the one exercising the skill (case in point, would you tape the sheetrock in your own house?).

◆ Able to distinguish good from evil: The end product of this extensive training is that the mature saint is able to distinguish, not by the externals, but rather by the hidden internals, that which is truly ‘good’ and that which is ‘evil’. The ability to distinguish ‘good’ from ‘evil’ beyond what is simply seen is a key demarcation of maturity.

¹ I suspect that most of us hate being called childish in our approach to life. That is precisely what the Hebrew writer is suggesting to his readers. They are behaving like children.

² I don’t know if I am the only one who notices this, but have any of you noticed we go out eating the same ‘mush’ that we enter the world eating in our infancy (having no teeth makes eating tough whether you are 2 months old or 90 years old).. I’m noticing it happening to me as I age. My interest, and willingness to eat ‘solid food’, the complicated ideas of ‘faith’ and how to spend a life trekking after God, seems to wane with each passing year. As one dear saint suggested to me recently, “I should not have to read or think when I come to church and don’t ask me to read an outline when I get home”. My prayer, “Lord protect me as I age to always hunger and thirst for the depth of your Word and your ways. Amen.” I don’t want to return to spiritual baby food...

³ Here is one of the those fun words that we have difficulty with in English. Literally the term means to train naked or to be stripped of all clothing while training. Here the writer seems to be implying that the training we must engage in ought to be a kind of training in which all distractions and others concerns in life are abandoned so that a single focus of attention can be arrived at.

The DNA of NewportNaz is relatively simple (see above). Your presence with us this morning provides Worship and Insight. The final step, the one that ultimately matters, application, can only happen after you exit this gathering place. Learning is relatively useless if it never becomes 'Applied Knowledge'.

Thinking about Principles...

- ~ In your experience are there concepts which are simply hard to explain?
- ~ What causing this dulling of which the Hebrew writer speaks?
- ~ How would you describe milk?
- ~ How would you describe solid food?
- ~ What ideas have you still not applied to real life living?
- ~ What does it mean to be skilled in the 'word of righteousness'?
- ~ How do we practice righteousness?

Thinking about Personal Application...

- ~ Are there any areas of your life that make God feel like God is watching Dumb and Dumber?
- ~ What ideas about the Kingdom of God have you embraced?
- ~ How do you practice those ideas?
- ~ What ideas and consequent skills have you mastered in trekking after Christ?
- ~ Can you identify any solid food you have recently eaten?
- ~ Can you identify any ways in which you have been able to discern between good and evil that wasn't obvious based on the externals?
- ~ What are you currently teaching others as you trek after God?

Action point (one thing I intend to do)...

NewportNaz's Daily Devotional is now available:
"NewportNaz Mornings With Oswald" on FaceBook