

(The Aggressive Holy Spirit) Word & Spirit: How God Plants Truth

by Jim Elliff

The Holy Spirit grants understanding to some and not to others, and understanding increases in the elect to an abundance.

Duration: 51:40

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Matthew 13:10-17, Mark 4:1-20, Luke 8:4-15, John 6:44, Acts 16:14

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the parable of the soils from Matthew 13. The main theme is understanding how God brings light and understanding to those who don't have it. The preacher emphasizes the importance of recognizing our dependence on God and the futility of relying solely on repetition or human effort for understanding. The sermon also highlights the supernatural work of God's Spirit in opening hearts and minds to comprehend the truth of His word. Additionally, the preacher discusses the blessings of understanding and how even the prophets longed to see and hear what the disciples were privileged to experience.

Transcript

If I don't rise, my toe will be tapping, I guarantee you. Hey guys, I have to confess again, I have eaten too much. How about you? Those cookies out there are about to kill me.

If you see me, listen. If you see me... Okay. Better than that, why don't you threaten to tell my wife? That'll even be, it's even more serious.

All right. Well, let's turn in our Bibles to Matthew chapter 13, please. Matthew chapter 13.

Now, of course, you're familiar with this great passage of Scripture that is in the first part of Matthew 13, the parable of the soils. I'm not going to preach on that passage, but I will make this comment. I will read it in a moment, but we'll make this comment that the Lord must have meant for us to understand this passage because he included it three times in the Scripture.

So this is a very important, very significant passage of Scripture. But my attention tonight is drawn to verse 10 and following. It's really a question that the disciples asked Jesus Christ after he had given the parable of the soils.

Disciples came to him, if you'll notice in verse 10, and they said to him, why do you speak to them in parables? The answer that Jesus gives in the next few verses down through verse 17 is the text of the message tonight and tells us a great deal about the way God gets understanding into the hearts of dead people. And that's a fascinating subject, but not just fascinating, it's absolutely strategic for you, isn't it? Because you care a great deal, don't you, about the people who hear you preach, those of you who are preachers. You care a great deal about your family and about your friends and your neighbors.

So this passage of Scripture is important for us tonight, isn't it? So we're going to try to delve into these verses and make observations and gain some insight into how God takes people who don't have any light and brings understanding to them. What is God doing? What are the implications of that? How is it working in the world even today, not just in his day? I have kind of a sub-theme as well that is going to be on my mind as I'm preaching through this text, and that is it is my goal to decimate our pride, to help us understand how absolutely dependent we are upon God to make it work. So let's read through the first few verses, the parable itself.

I won't make any comments. You understand, of course, that the persons are the soils. The soils are not the plants.

The persons are the soils, and the seed is, of course, the gospel itself, the word of Christ. Now listen to this in verse 1. That day Jesus went out of the house and was sitting by the sea, and large crowds gathered to him. So he got into a boat, and he sat down, and the whole crowd was standing on the beach.

And he spoke many things to them in parables, saying, Behold, the sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell beside the road, and the birds came and ate them up. Others fell on the rocky places where they did not have much soil, and immediately they sprang up because they had no depth of soil.

But when the sun had risen, they were scorched, and because they had no root, they withered away. Others fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked them out. And others fell on the good soil.

And of course, we understand this to be the true Christian, don't we, the one who becomes the believer in Christ. Others fell on the good soil and yielded a crop, some a hundredfold, and some sixty and some thirty. He who has ears, let him hear.

And in my view, as we go through the next portion of the scripture here, we will find, I think, that that phrase, he who has ears, represents or speaks of a category of people. He who has ears, let him hear. Some years ago, during the colonial period in our nation's history, one of the great preachers, Samuel Davies, preached a message called the success of the ministry owing to divine influence.

And here is what he said. I want to read his words. The different success of the same means of grace in different periods of the church sufficiently shows the necessity of gracious influences to render them efficacious.

It is not by power. It is by the power of God, nor by might, but by the spirit of the Lord of hosts that the interests of religion are carried on. Our own experience and observation furnish us with many instances in which this great truth has been exemplified.

Sometimes the reading of a sermon has been the means of awakening careless sinners, when at other times the most solemn and argumentative preaching has been in vain. Sometimes we've seen a number of sinners thoroughly awakened and brought to seek the Lord in earnest, while another number, under the very same sermon and who seemed as open to conviction as the former, or perhaps more so, have remained secure and thoughtless as usual. And whence could this difference arise but from special grace? We have seen persons struck to the heart with those doctrines which they had heard a hundred times without any effect.

He who has ears to hear, let him hear. Now the disciples come to Jesus and ask this interesting question. Of course, Jesus, in this particular chapter of scripture, is giving us several parables, these little agrarian stories.

And if you have never read this passage of scripture before, I think you'd have a ready answer for that question from the disciples. You would probably say, having never read it, you would probably say that the parables were used by Jesus Christ for the express purpose of making things understandable, making them very simple and accessible to his audience. But in fact, the very opposite is the answer, as we will find out.

Let's see what Jesus Christ says and make the appropriate observations as we go through the passage. Let me read the entire text now from verse 10 through verse 17. And the disciples came to him and said to him, Why do you speak to them in parables? Jesus answered them, To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted.

For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance. But whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.

In their case, the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, You will keep on hearing, but will not what? You will not understand. You will keep on seeing, but will not perceive. For the heart of this people has become dull.

With their ears they scarcely hear, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they would see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and what? Understand with their heart, and return, and I would heal them. But blessed are your eyes, because they see, and your ears, because they hear.

For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it. Now the first statement I want to make in attempting to understand Jesus' answer is based on verse 11, where Jesus again says, To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. So let me put it in almost the same words.

Understanding of the mysteries of the kingdom is granted to some and not to others. Now there's a fact that you and the people in your church will have to live with, won't they? It's just the truth of it. God makes it absolutely plain.

There can be no equivocating about this statement, can there? To some it has been given to understand, to others it has not been granted. Truth or understanding is something that is given or granted by God. Now it's amazing, isn't it? I'm sure you've had a similar amazement as I have through the years that so

many people don't get it when you're such a good explainer of the gospel.

I think of myself sometimes as a person who, vainly I'm sure, but as a person who tries to make things simple and understandable and reachable. But I am amazed, I have to say sometimes when you talk to intelligent people and they just don't seem to understand. And then one of the other amazements that I have is that many people who are responsible for actually proclaiming the word, maybe even go to school to learn how to proclaim the truths of the kingdom of God, don't get it either.

Now I have a habit, and several of us in our church, I may speak a little about this tomorrow, but I have a habit of going to liberal churches for the sake of evangelism. I do that regularly. It's just part of my evangelism practice through the years.

And I've been amazed at how many people there preaching the gospel really don't have a clue what they're saying. They'll sometimes read a scripture, you know in liberal churches they tend to read more scripture than we do in our evangelical churches. But they'll read a scripture and then they will say things that seem to have no connection to the scripture that they've read at all.

I mean, I remember hearing one pastor preach about the subject of the wheat and the tares and he went to great pains to tell us what that meant was good and bad influences in your life. I thought, that doesn't have any connection whatsoever with that text of scripture that he read. Or another man talked about the Gadarene Demoni Act and he said this is all about our fractured lives.

We've got so many things to do. You have to run to the PTA meeting, you have to go to this meeting, that, and we're just all, our lives are all broken up, you know, with all these things to do. In one Methodist church that I was in, forgive me if anybody here is a Methodist, the devil by the way was a Methodist, the Bible says we're not ignorant of his methods.

But I turned to a charter member of the church, an old fellow, it was a rather large Methodist church and I have a habit of asking questions of people after the sermon to just, you know, see what will come up and what I can do. And I said, what is your church's view of the Bible? He said, well, he said, I'm a chaplain for the Masons. And he said, now, in the Masons he said, I believe that we, you know, we have a little stronger view of the Bible than we do here in our church.

But he said, now you have to know the languages, you have to know Hebrew and Greek and Babylonian. And it's all I could do to keep from just bursting out laughing. But apparently the guy thought that the pastor, who just never could seem to get it when he was speaking, knew Babylonian, I guess, because he would listen to him week after week after week, I'm sure scratching his head occasionally, but saying, well, if you know Babylonian, that must be what it means, you know.

One of the themes that runs through the Gospels, and particularly in the Gospel of John, in my observation, is this idea that people don't get it. A lot of times with the Pharisees, why don't you understand? Let me just take you to John real quickly and we're going to come back to our text. But let's go to John chapter 8 and just look at one case of this.

We could look at several and they're all fascinating. But John chapter 8, and let's look here at verse 43, I think is where we want to be. All right, let's start there, verse 43.

Why do you not understand what I am saying? It is because you cannot hear my word. You are of your father the devil and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning and

does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in it.

Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But because I speak the truth, you do not believe me. Which one of you convicts me of sin? And here I think he's simply saying, I have impeccable life, and yet you won't believe me.

Impeccable, you can't even accuse me of any sin, yet you won't believe what I say. Which one of you convicts me of sin? If I speak truth, why do you not believe me? He who is of God hears the words of God. For this reason you do not understand them, because you are not of God.

You see, it's been granted to some and not to others. Look at that verse 45, which I think is particularly telling. If you put the emphasis here, it helps us see it, I think, a little better.

Look at this, verse 45, but because I speak the truth, you do not hear me. If I would distort things, if I was like your father, the devil, then you could listen to me, and you could hear what I have to say, but it's for the very reason that I speak the truth that you are incapable of getting what I say. Back to Matthew 13.

Sometimes we're caught up, we're mistaken about this idea of understanding, and we look at somebody who seems to be able to articulate, in a way, the truths about the gospel, and we might be confused in thinking that they actually have understanding simply because they can articulate things in a certain accurate way. Let me illustrate what I mean. Suppose you had a professor in one of the state schools who was a professor in the area of religion, and he was an atheist.

That's not really an unusual situation at all, is it? Here you have an atheistic professor, and he gets to that point in his lecture series where he's to talk about the reformed doctrine of justification by faith alone. He is perfectly accurate, both in his history and in his doctrine, when he gives that lecture. And then the professor goes into the teacher's lounge and he kicks off his shoes and puts his feet up on the coffee table and lights up his cigarette, and a couple of other professors around the room.

He says, well, today I gave my lecture on the reformed doctrine of justification by faith alone. A person would have to be a fool to believe that. Now, do you think that that man understands the doctrine of justification by faith alone? No, he doesn't understand it.

If he understood it, he'd know who the fool was, right? And he would flee from his sin, and he would run to Jesus Christ if he really understood it. He doesn't understand it. He can state things about it, but he doesn't understand the doctrine really at all.

So when the Bible talks about the impact of the seed of the word of God on a person's life, it's absolutely essential that they have not just the ability to parrot back to you some things about that truth, but God is, if he's regenerating them, he is actually giving them light, he's giving them understanding, and they're hearing the word of God. Now, that doesn't happen, in my view, as I've looked through the scripture, it doesn't seem to happen at all until the word of God is viewed as irresistible, inescapable, true, reliable, and justifiable. Beautiful, excellent, exquisite, powerful.

Let me tell you why. Because that's what the word of God really is. And you couldn't possibly be understanding it until you grasp it for what it really is.

You see? So when that begins to happen, you know God is granting an understanding of the mysteries of the kingdom of God. How important that is. I told the church they're Cornerstone Church, where I

preached, I had the privilege of preaching this Sunday, I told them about my son's conversion.

My son was converted when he was 18 years of age. He was a very fine, model child in many ways. He was totally compliant in the family and a very fine child.

Many people would have thought him a Christian, because of his interests and things and so forth. But he knew that he wasn't. And he grappled for several years actually with the deep apologetic questions.

He would struggle with them. He found that there was no way that he could get to a place where he couldn't doubt. He always could doubt.

You know, a little bit of doubt goes a long, long way. He read more apologetics books than probably you've read. Or I've read, frankly.

How was he converted? Well, he was converted as he, I didn't know this was going on, but for some long period of time, he would lock himself into the room and for two to three hours a day, he would go over and over the Gospels of Jesus Christ. And as he went over and over, reading through it time and time and time again, here's what he told me when he was converted. He told me, he said, what happened to me was not my apologetics questions getting answered.

But what happened to me is I saw the beauty of the word and I could not resist its truth. Now, I really believe that's the work of God's spirit. And I believe that's the way God does it.

In one way or another, that's the way God does it. He is opening the understanding, opening the heart of the individual to understand as a supernatural work really, isn't it? It is granted to some and it is not granted to others. Live with that truth, rejoice in it in some ways because it has some powerful implications in the positive as well as what appears to be negative.

The second statement I believe we could make out of Matthew 13 and the answer of Jesus is found in verse 12. And it's a curious sentence. For whoever has, to him more shall be given and he will have an abundance.

But whoever does not have even what he has shall be taken away from him. Now that is an interesting statement, isn't it? And it's the kind of thing Jesus says in another place or two as well. Whoever has, to him more shall be given.

And by the way, here he's talking about people, the haves and the have-nots really here, isn't he? Some people have, some people do not have. What is it that he's talking about when he says whoever has? Has what? Has what? Well of course in the context it is has understanding. Whoever has understanding, to him more will be given.

But whoever does not have understanding, even what he has, and I think he means by that kind of phraseology, even what it appears that he has, will be taken away from him. So our observation could be this. Understanding increases in the elect to an abundance.

But even the appearance of understanding is taken away from the non-elect. In other words, what he's saying is this. There is no such thing as a person in your church who has professed to be a Christian for, who is a Christian for thirty long years who is at the same place in their understanding as they were in the very beginning.

No such thing. Jesus says if you have, more will be given. Not just more, to an abundance, Jesus said.

Now you know I, I have to think here a minute about old people. And it's an amazing thing. I'm kind of moving that direction a little bit lately.

And I'll soon be fifty-eight. Is that old yet? Some of you. I see a few older people here.

Good. Good. Well I'm encouraged.

I'm encouraged by what I'm hearing. Alright. But it's interesting as you get a little bit older and we're all, we are all moving that direction.

So be kind to old people, right? As you get older, you not only wear the kind of shoes you want to wear that make a difference what they look like, right? But typically you begin to speak a little bit more frankly about what you believe. You care less actually. You're not, no popularity contest anymore.

And it's been an interesting thing through the years as I've talked to older people. I've had the experience on a number of occasions actually talking with older people about their relationship to Christ to find to my amazement that when asked about their, you know, how they entered into relationship with Christ, they'll answer something like this. I was, you know, I joined the church when I was seventeen.

And that would be their answer to the question. Now when they were earlier in church life and they cared more about what everybody thought, they would express with the proper nuances and kind of the way that everybody would understand in the, you know, about their conversion and it would be satisfactory to everybody. But now that they're older, they just say really what pops into their mind, what they really perhaps believe.

What I'm saying is that there are, there is an indicator here, isn't there, that it's very important for us to see that kind of person. You know what I'm talking about. Otherwise a very nice person.

They make a great coconut pie or something. You know, they're active in, when you have a work day at the church, they might be there. But really as you look at their life over all these years, at a time now after so many years of supposedly being a Christian, they ought to be at the apogee of their wisdom and understanding of the things of God, they seem to really have almost no understanding.

You know what I'm talking about, don't you? Have almost no understanding. You can't really attribute this to just a lack of education, they didn't go to college or whatever. It's not that, is it? All these sermons, all these years of Bible teaching, all that, you know, all that they have has come in through those eyes and the eye gate and the ear gate, but it doesn't seem to make any difference whatsoever in their real understanding.

That's a frightening thing, isn't it? But you find them, don't you? Third observation, look at verse 13. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. In their case, the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, you will keep on hearing, but will not understand.

You will keep on seeing, but will not perceive. And the third observation then is this, repetition of truth does not produce understanding. Repetition of truth does not produce understanding.

They'll keep on hearing, but they really will not perceive or understand what's going on. That's true of so many people, isn't it? And here I have to think a little bit about our children, because there's never been a day like our day, really, in terms of resources for teaching children. Would you agree with that? Some of you who are older remember back years ago, it just was nothing like the kind of resources that are available to people, and the concern on the part of a lot of people about inculcating the truths of God into the hearts of their children.

There really is a lot of concern. A lot's going on in that area, and I'm happy that it's going on, but there's an interesting thing that's happening, though, in some people's families, I think, as they teach them umpteen Scripture verses, which is perfectly right to do. I did the same thing with my children, as they catechized them, and so forth.

They teach them Bible story after Bible story. They have in their minds, subtly, the parent begins to think they have sort of a half Christian there. Now, the truth is that they might be raising a very dangerous person, right? They might be raising a little moralist or a little Pharisee who does not have a perception of what it means to be converted to Christ, really.

They just move from all that great knowledge that they have to a church life and through their life, and these are dangerous people, and if they ever happen to turn on Christianity, they're especially dangerous, because they have all this data in their mind. Remember the Apostle Paul, who was originally named Saul, and he had more learning, perhaps, than any of our children. Now, they remember huge portions of Scripture as not young Jewish children, but did Saul have understanding? No, listen, by the way, we forget this sometimes.

He had the same Bible before he was converted that he had afterwards, and as he was studying that same Bible, he was persecuting the church. Now, is repetition absolutely wrong in and of itself? Well, no, but I'm just making this point. It in itself does not produce the understanding that you so desperately need.

It doesn't do it. If it were so, if it did it, the people with the greatest understanding in the United States would be the people in the rescue missions. I mean, they don't even get to eat until they hear another message, right? You can eat cookies any time you want, but they have to hear another message.

Now, I think of the Apostle Paul like this. Have you ever had one of these little, they're usually plastic, maybe metal, but it's a little apparatus where you can take your change at the end of the day, and you just reach in your pocket, and you throw your change in the top of it, and then everything sort of filters down. The quarters go in the right spot, and the nickels, and the dimes, and so forth, and the pennies, they all drop, they all filter down into the right spot, and that's the way I think of Saul.

He had all this vast amount of knowledge in his head. He was out, because of this knowledge, because of the knowledge that he had, he was that dangerous person I'm talking about. He was actually out persecuting the church, but when he met up with Christ on the Damascus Road, what happened? It's just like that coin apparatus.

Everything just went, oh, that's what it means, as he said in Damascus with his Old Testament open. That's what this means. This is what that means.

That's what that means, and all of that vast amount of knowledge found its way into the right slots, and so forth, and it became, of course, a very effective instrument, and so I'm hopeful that repetition can actually

produce some good in the end of it all, and that's our hope, of course, as we teach our children, and we train them in all the ways that we do, but let me tell you something. If God doesn't do something, it's not going to help at all, not in the least bit. In fact, it may lead them far away from God, so repetition in and of itself does not produce understanding.

And then a fourth observation. Look down in verse 15. For the heart of this people has become dull.

With their ears they scarcely hear, and they have closed their eyes. Otherwise they would see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and return, and I would heal them. Responsibility.

Here's the fourth observation. Responsibility for failure to understand is entirely the person's. It is entirely the person's.

You say, well, wait a minute, Jim, what are you saying? You're saying to some it has been granted, to others it has not been granted. I understand, but what the Lord is really saying here is this, that if there is understanding in your heart, if you are one of those privileged to understand, you must attribute it all to God, but if you don't understand it's because you've closed your ears to God. You are responsible.

God never lets us get around this really, does he, at all. He always lays that blame at the feet of the individual. You are the one stuffing your fingers in your ears and not hearing the things of God.

You are unwilling to hear. You will not hear. You are bound, of course, to your fallen nature.

Romans 3 says there's none who understands. Nobody understands. They have all turned aside.

It is the responsibility of the person that they do not understand at all. A fifth observation is this. Look at verse 16.

But blessed are your eyes because they see, and your ears because they hear. For truly I say to you that many prophets and righteous men desired to see what you see and did not see it and to hear what you hear and did not hear it. And here is that observation.

Understanding is so great a blessing that even the prophets long to see and hear what you see and hear. I just think we need to have a proper evaluation of what's going on here. Why is it, I mean, we can actually, I'm looking around here and there are a few of you who have been or are in mission work.

Why is it that you can name some countries and all you can think of is darkness? Why is it that you can name some denominations of supposed Christians and all you think of is darkness? They don't have the gospel. Why is it that you live in a part of the world where so few are really believers? You know one time I did, this is nowhere near accurate, couldn't possibly be accurate, but I actually took the census data, you can buy a book that has the religious census data, and I took that religious census data, I went through it meticulously in my little informal survey, and I deduced just from what I know about various denominations and so forth, this, that, and the other, in my mind all I could see, I could only see the possibility of there being about four, possibly five percent of the United States who would truly be Christian. Now that's, you can double that if you want to or cut it in half, it's not important to me, but I'm just making a point here that there are very few.

I remember being in Connecticut, some of you are from Connecticut, and with a friend of mine as I was preaching there, I've been many times there, drawing a line around a fairly good sized circle of towns, and thinking to ourselves how many people were hearing the gospel on a given Sunday morning, and we couldn't get above one percent in that area. That may be even better than your area, I don't know. Why is that? Isn't that amazing? But isn't it astounding that you understand the gospel? Why do you understand? Why do you understand and your brother not understand? Why do you understand and your dad and mom don't get it? Why is it that you, why is it, why did you have that blessing? Do you realize what a great blessing that is? For you to have a comprehension and understanding of the truths of the kingdom of God.

You've been given something amazing, really. And then another observation, look down just below this, and I'm not going to read, you'll notice all of this, but notice verse 18 down through verse 23, what Jesus does is he begins to explain the meaning of the parable in the first nine verses, the parable of the soils. And the observation that I take from this is simply this idea that understanding of kingdom truths, though granted, is still to be pursued through normal means.

And what I mean is that the normal reflexive thinking, the normal use of the eyes, the normal use of the ears to hear the truths of God, the asking of questions of somebody who knows the truth, the getting of information through teachers, the reading of the Bible in pursuit of it like my son had done, that's a very normal, those are normal means of learning something. But don't you think for a moment that there's nothing supernatural going on. God has ordained that this brain, this brain right here, these eyes, these ears be the instruments that he uses to do something absolutely otherworldly in our lives.

It's no less supernatural because normal means are used. Solomon is said to be the wisest man in the Old Testament. What did he say about getting wisdom and understanding? Dig for it.

Dig for it like you're digging for gold. But nobody would have, should have appreciated the idea that wisdom and understanding is granted more than Solomon, right? The way we get truths is not by bombshells in the sky, you know, and reading license plates, you know, and having mystical experiences, at least not normatively. But it's through the truth, it's through the truths of the Word of God.

Really, God makes himself known by his communicating through his Word. Now, that's an important concept because you really don't know anybody apart from their communication, do you? You don't know anybody. There has to be words, there has to be an unveiling, there has to be something communicated by the individual before you will ever know them.

God has used these words then. Of course, it is more than merely words, isn't it? Every word of the Bible is the truth of God, it is God's real Word, isn't it? But the Bible says, they shall be taught by me, right, of the Father. Those who have been taught and by the way of understanding and you see the idea of teaching and the use of propositions and words, right? But we see something more than just the mere use of the reason or the mind because we see that the Father is teaching the individual.

So that somebody can hear Jesus speak, even Jesus, even Jesus and not get it, right? But the person who hears the words of Jesus will be brought to understanding if the Father is teaching that person, right? Do you believe that? I believe that. A few implications quickly that will help us. First of all, though I've used the word amazement many times and I'm amazed, let me just tell you don't be amazed that people don't get it.

We've got to get in our minds that it's not, should not be surprising to us that some people don't get it, that many people don't get it, frankly. I had the privilege, and I really want to kind of qualify that word privilege when you hear what it is, but I had the privilege of going to speak to scientists in the Fermi Lab in Chicago. Any of you know what that is? Fermi Lab is a mile-long nuclear accelerator, I think they call it, is that right? And they're examining the Big Bang, and I had a friend there who was a scientist, and he said, I don't believe in the Big Bang, but it pays for my meals and things, it takes care of my family, so I'm here studying, you know, working.

But he worked it out for little Jim Elliott to come in there and talk, they're Nobel Prize winning scientists in this place, and so here I am meekly entering the doors of the famous Fermi Lab in Chicago, and we were going to have a voluntary meeting of any scientist who wanted to come, and I was to, of all things, not to speak, but I was to answer questions of the scientists. Do you think I was a little bit nervous that day? I had irritable bowel syndrome, by the way. It was a tough day, tough day.

So, but much to my surprise, they asked the same questions that everybody else asks. So I was trying to answer these questions, and feeling better as I was going along. One scientist then asked a question over here, and he said, you know, Jim, what do you really have to do to be a Christian? How hard do you have to work? How much effort, you know, do you have to put into this to be a Christian? I said, well, that's a good question, and I began to explain this simple question to us, and that's a simple, easy thing for us to answer.

I began to explain about the fact that salvation is by grace through faith, and I illustrated it, and I said it's not on the merits. This is not by something you do, really. It's, you know, that God rewards.

It's just by grace and faith. I explained it all, made it plain. I thought any junior high kid could have understood what I said.

And afterwards, and he was nodding his head and listening thoughtfully, and afterwards, he came up to me, and he said, shook my hand, and said, Jim, thank you very much for being here, and thank you especially for answering my question. I guess I'll just have to try harder to be a Christian. I just, shoo, went right past him.

In one way, that made me kind of feel pretty good, you know what I mean? He didn't understand something. But in another way, of course, it was sad. Don't be surprised, really, when people don't understand.

It's something that God grants to some and not to others. We shouldn't be surprised then. But by the same token, because understanding comes by the Spirit of God, even the most incorrigible sinner might understand.

I like this doctrine because I know that God could do the most astounding things. That dad of yours that you have tried to talk to for years and years and years, he's absolutely hardened to everything. God might break through and grant him, all of a sudden, understanding.

He can do that. He's done it millions of times, really. He's done it over and over and over again.

There's hope in this message, isn't there? Would you really want it another way? No, not really. You want it this way. Otherwise, if you thought it was on the basis of your ability to persuade them, and I'm not saying we don't use the normal means of persuading, but if it really happened on the basis of your

persuading, you wouldn't have any hope at all anymore.

But you do have some hope because God could do it. I'm really happy about that. Another implication is this.

Understanding, you must not forget, is granted in the believer's life as well. This doesn't stop when you first understand the gospel. It's an ongoing process.

I read not long ago in my Bible reading, I was in the end of the book of Luke, I believe it was Luke 24, and I read that passage about those disciples of Christ who were walking along with the resurrected Christ, and he was explaining things out of the Old Testament. And the Bible says this, Then he opened their minds to understand the things which he had been saying to them. That's the picture, isn't it? Isn't that a beautiful thought? It still remains this way.

As we speak to believers, it's still this way in the congregation. And it's that way for us. That God is the one who does this.

Now this is a true story. It's not a preacher story, I'm going to tell you. This man was in Arkansas.

He was pastoring in Arkansas, in Hot Springs, Arkansas, where there used to be more millionaires than any place in the United States. But it's pastoring the Park Place Baptist Church. And he said a woman came to visit him, to visit the church one day.

She had a son who had an incapacity to understand things very well and articulate things. He obviously had some difficulties in his thinking process. It was obvious to everybody.

And at any rate, they came and visited in the church, and he returned the visit and went to the home of this woman to talk to her. And when he was walking up to the house, he said the young boy was there with a Bible in his lap. And he was oblivious to anybody else being anywhere around him, and he was speaking out loud, as sometimes you find people do, particularly maybe in that category.

And he was just speaking out loud with that characteristic. And what he was doing was this. He was looking down at the Bible, and he would read a phrase of the Bible out loud.

And then he would close his eyes and he would say, now what does that mean? And then he would read it again out loud. Now what does that mean? And then he would say, oh! And he would read the next phrase. Something very right about what he was doing, and something we should never forget could learn from him.

It's not merely your reason and the Bible. It is the Word and the Spirit that brings understanding. And that's true for you.

It's true for preachers. It's true for people who've been veterans as far as Christianity is concerned. You have to have this work of God's Spirit as you open the Word.

You're pursuing it with your mind and your eyes and your ears. You're aggressively pursuing it, but you don't get it. You don't have any great understanding unless the Spirit of God is opening your mind to understand.

You know that great Psalm, Psalm 119, has so much to do with the Word of God as you read through it. Have you ever noticed the way most of that is framed in the Psalm by David? He'll say things like this, open my mind to understand the Scriptures. Teach me thy statutes.

Why did he phrase it like that? Because he knew that God was the one that had to make it happen. He said God had to make it happen in his mind. Even Jesus, when he said in John 17, 17, sanctify them by the truth.

Thy word is truth. Why did he put it like that? Why did he go to the Father and say sanctify them? Because he knew it had to be a supernatural work. It would always be this way.

Which leads me to a fourth implication and a final one. That is this, and particularly helpful for those of us who teach and preach and try to handle the Word of God and help other people. That is this, don't teach without prayer.

Don't teach without prayer. You're not going to make them understand by your eloquence or your ability or all the study you do. You can pour over things all week long and God's the one that has to open their hearts to give them understanding.

Let's bow our heads and pray. Lord, I thank you again for the clarity of your Word and how pertinent it is 2,000 years later to our situation. How needed by us.

What a reminder. Help us, Lord, to always live with that kind of humility that recognizes that you are the one who grants understanding. Never let us forget that.

In our own personal procurement of truth, our own seeking of truth, help us to remember it. Help us to remember it in our own evangelism. Help us to remember it in our teaching and preaching of the Word of God.

Never let us forget the place that your Spirit has in this area of understanding. We praise you, Lord, for it. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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