

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*A Biblical Balance.*"

On Sunday mornings we're working our way through Luke's Gospel verse-by-verse, and last week we concluded **Luke 10:21-24**. There's something else going on in these verses that I didn't draw attention to last week, b/c it didn't fit w/ the main point of the sermon, and it didn't fit in the sermon. But I think it's too important to overlook, so I want to draw attention to it this morning.

We'll begin by looking at a verse we covered last year. Turn to **Luke 8:10**.

The context is Jesus told the Parable of the Sower in verses 5 through 8. The disciples asked Jesus about the parable in **verse 9**, and Jesus responded in **verse 10**...

Luke 8:10 he said, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God (or spiritual truths), but for others they are in parables, so that 'seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.'

This verse teaches that spiritual insight comes from special revelation by God, and notice Jesus didn't say **TO EVERYONE** it has been given to know the secrets. Instead He says **To you** and then He says **for others**.

He divides everyone up into two groups:

1. **To you** is the first group, and these are believers who get to know **the mysteries of the kingdom of God**. In the language of **Luke 10:21** spiritual truth is **revealed** to them.
2. **For others** is the second group, and these are unbelievers who don't have spiritual truth revealed to them...or in the language of **Luke 10:21**, spiritual truth is **hidden** from them.

Notice there's no discussion of why some people receive spiritual truth, but it's hidden from others. It simply says **given** to some, but not to others.

Keep this in mind and turn back to **Luke 10:21**. We talked about this verse last week, but I won't be saying anything that I already told you...

Luke 10:21 In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things (this would be spiritual truths, or as **Luke 8:10** said, the secrets of the kingdom of God) from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.

This verse gives us a wonderful window into WHY some people receive spiritual truth, but others don't. This is similar to **Luke 8:10**, but it contains a significant addition. Notice the words **hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children**. This shows the part man plays in understanding – or not understanding – spiritual truth.

And this brings us to Lesson 1...

LESSON 1: (PART I) SPIRITUAL TRUTH IS HIDDEN FROM THE PROUD...

When Jesus said the Father **hides** spiritual truth from **the wise and understanding** this isn't as literal as it sounds. The bible encourages us – especially in Proverbs – to pursue wisdom and understanding:

- Instead, Jesus is speaking sarcastically about prideful people.
- He's talking about spiritual truth being hidden from the proud, which makes sense, b/c how can the Father reveal truth to people who think they already know everything?

It's similar to **Rom 12:16b Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.**

We're not to **be wise in [our own sight]** in the sense of thinking we have everything figured out.

Look back at **verse 21** again. It says...

In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said, "I thank you, Father,

This also helps us understand WHY Jesus rejoiced...

He rejoiced that the Father didn't create a plan of salvation that only allowed the intelligent to be saved. If that was the case, then instead of faith being the requirement for salvation, the requirement would be brilliance, or cleverness, or natural ability. Salvation would only be available to those w/ the most superior minds.

The plan of salvation also isn't available only to those who obtain the most academically or educationally. A considerable amount of knowledge in this life comes through human effort:

1. You work hard in school.
2. You work hard studying and learning.

If salvation depended on academics or education, then it would only be available to those who put forth enough effort.

We all have different strengths and weaknesses:

- Some people are sharper than others. They learn faster. They do better academically.
- But spiritual understanding does not depend on intellect or education.

Jesus is actually making the point that these can be a hindrance if they become a source of pride. Intellect can be an obstacle to receiving spiritual truth if it makes you prideful.

Listen to these verses...

1 Cor 1:26 But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame THE WISE; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; 28 God chose what is low and despised in the world,

even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, 29 so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

God doesn't want anyone boasting that they know what they know, or understand what they understand, b/c they're so much smarter than everyone else.

And this brings us to the next part of Lesson 1...

LESSON 1: (PART I) SPIRITUAL TRUTH IS HIDDEN FROM THE PROUD (PART II) AND REVEALED TO THE HUMBLE.

Understanding spiritual truth is not an issue of intellect or education, but it is an issue of humility and lowliness.

The words **revealed them to little children**, also aren't as literal as they sound. Jesus isn't talking about physical **children**. God definitely reveals spiritual truths to children, but He's referring to those who are like children in their humility.

It's similar to Jesus' words in **Luke 18:17** when he said...

Luke 18:17 Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it."

Like infants, they have no confidence in themselves and are completely dependent on the strength and mercy of others.

This was illustrated to me pretty early in my Christian life through a situation I experienced...

I was invited to speak at a 12-step program to recovering drug addicts. The gentleman who invited me knew my brother had died of a drug overdose. At that time I hardly knew the Bible. I was reading by alternating between Old and New Testament books: Matt, Gen, Mark, Exo. Then Elwyn said, "Have you read about David?" I said, "No." He said, "You gotta read 1 Samuel." I didn't even know David was in 1 Samuel; I thought he would've been in 1 David.

I'm reading through 1 Sam and I reach chapter 10. When Saul walked away from Samuel, it says God gave him a new heart. That amazed me. I thought, "God can give people new hearts!" So I hardly knew anything about the Bible, but that's what I chose to share at this group: "God gave Saul a new heart on the spot, and He can give you a new heart."

Soon after the evening concluded a gentleman was walking toward me, and it was clear years of drug use had taken a toll on him. He was probably in his 30s, but he looked like he was in his 80s. You could see it in his teeth, his face, his posture, and I completely judged him. I thought, "Oh great, here comes some guy that's going to start preaching to me...or correcting what I had to say...or telling me about his life and how hard it's been, and he's going to give me lots of excuses to justify the situation he's in.

Instead, when he started talking to me, I was amazed by his wisdom and humility. I noticed he had a Bible that was duct taped. He'd read it so much it started falling apart, so he taped it to keep it together. He was humble, gracious, and the thing that most stuck out to me was how wise he was, and how well he knew God's Word.

Drugs had taken a terrible toll on him, but he was humble and God revealed considerable spiritual truth to him.

There's a principle in Scripture that can be seen from Genesis to Revelation, and it's this...

God has determined that we must humble before He will lift us up.

- **Pro 3:34 God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.** This is quoted in **Jam 4:6.**
- **1 Pet 5:6 Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you.**

This principle applies to all areas of the Christian life...including understanding spiritual truth...

Jesus' words in **Luke 10:21** are a great example of this principle:

- He resists the proud by hiding spiritual truth from them
- He gives grace to the humble by revealing spiritual truth to them

Let me get you to briefly look back at **verse 23**...

Luke 10:23 Then turning to the disciples he said privately, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see!"

The disciples were privileged to have the revelation they had:

- They stood near Jesus when He said this.
- They heard the words that came out of His mouth.

This made them more blessed than OT saints who longed to see the Messiah...

Luke 10:24 For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it."

Jesus helped the disciples see how blessed they were by pointing out that the greatest saints in the OT longed to see what they saw and hear what they heard...but couldn't. The lesson I gave you last week associated w/ this...

REVELATION WE'VE RECEIVED MAKES US MORE BLESSED THAN OLD TESTAMENT SAINTS.

I also took you to some verses in **1 Pet 1** that discuss how much the prophets wanted to see what we see and hear what we hear...

1 Pet 1:10 Concerning the salvation (this means the salvation that's been made available to us in the NT) **the prophets who prophesied about the grace** (this refers to the Gospel, b/c we're saved by grace) **that was to be yours** (or the salvation that's ours, and then notice this...the prophets) **SEARCHED AND INQUIRED CAREFULLY.**

They wanted to understand the revelation that's been made available to us.

Since we have the NT, guess who has more revelation – not just than OT saints, but – even than the disciples in Jesus' day?

We do!

Now considering this whole discussion of pride and humility, let me ask you this...

We're blessed b/c of all the revelation we've received, BUT does this mean we know everything? Does this mean we have it all figured out?

Part of having the humility that Jesus discussed is answering, "No."

I don't want you to think it's my opinion that we're still somewhat in the dark regarding revelation and spiritual truth, so let me give you a few verses that make this point...

1 Cor 13:12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part (our knowledge at this time is only partial); **then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.**

This sounds odd, b/c we know when we look in a mirror we see pretty clearly, but mirrors in Paul's day were polished metals. They looked more like the mirrors in gas stations. You look into them, but they're blurry. You can't see clearly.

And this describes our knowledge or revelation: there's still some blurriness.

Here's another verse...

Deut 29:29 The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.

All knowledge and truth is divided up into two categories:

- There's **the things that are revealed** to us.
- But there's also **secret things that belong [only] to the Lord.**

Here are two more verses that should prevent us from thinking we have it all figured out...

Isa 55:8 For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.

**9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
so are my ways higher than your ways
and my thoughts than your thoughts.**

God says His ways are above our ways. Our finite minds can't understand an infinite God. There will be truths in the Christian life that simply take place above our understanding.

One teaching in Scripture that seems to cause the most confusion and tension relates to God's sovereignty and man's free will. This might be the most famous, and longstanding debate in the church.

We don't understand how these two can go together. They seem to be mutually exclusive:

- If God is completely sovereign, man can't have free will
- If man has free will, God can't be completely sovereign

They seem irreconcilable, but the Bible teaches both, so we have to accept both.

One reason I'm mentioning this is we get to see a biblical balance between the two in this morning's passage...

You see God's sovereignty in two ways:

1. First, it says God has **hidden and revealed these things**. This affirms God's sovereignty in hiding and revealing spiritual truth.
2. Also, notice it says it was **the Father's will** to do this.

This shows God's sovereignty over the bestowal of spiritual truth.

But you also see the importance of man's free moral agency when Jesus discusses humility and pride.

You could look at this and say:

- Does God sovereignly reveal spiritual truth? The answer is, "Yes."
- Does man's humility and pride play some part in understanding spiritual truth? The answer is, "Yes."

The application is:

- We have to accept some mystery in our relationships with the Lord.
- We have to allow for the tension.

This brings us to Lesson 2...

LESSON 2: AVOID SWINGING THE PENDULUM TO ONE EXTREME.

If we accept the tension, we can avoid the mistake of swinging the pendulum too far to one extreme or the other. The problem w/ doing this is we end up denying a mountain of verses that are on the other side of the spectrum.

One reason I share this w/ you is I hope it can spare you some of the frustration I experienced early in my Christian life.

I started reading the Bible and:

- I recognized it taught God was sovereign
- And I recognized it taught man was a free moral agent

I thought, “These both can’t be true, so which is it?”

Whenever I met a Christian who seemed to know the bible well, I asked him to solve this for me. When Katie and I were going over the sermon, she shared how she remembered me asking everyone we ran into.

You might be able to guess that nobody ever had a completely satisfactory answer...and that's b/c there isn't one.

I had to finally accept that on this side of heaven I would never understand completely...and I think this is part of walking by faith...

2 Cor 5:7 we walk by faith, not by sight

Walking by faith means accepting what God's Word teaches...even if we don't fully understand it. This is what it means to trust God.

I want to show you two passages that encourage us to have a biblical balance:

- One passage focuses on the sovereignty of God.
- One passage focuses on the free moral agency of man.

Please turn to **Rom 9**. If I had to choose one chapter in Scripture that mostly clearly reveals the sovereignty of God, this would be it...

Rom 9:18 So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

The sovereignty of God is shown so strongly it says He **has mercy** on some, but **He hardens** others. Pharaoh is the example Paul discussed earlier.

This brings up an obvious question which Paul anticipates his readers asking, so He asks it...

Rom 9:19 You will say to me then, “Why does he still find fault? For who can resist his will?”

This makes perfect sense: if God is so sovereign – or in such control over man – that He softens and hardens whom He wants, then how can He find fault in people...when He’s basically controlling them?

Look at Paul’s answer...and I use the word “answer” loosely...

Rom 9:20 But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? Will what is molded say to its molder, “Why have you made me like this?”

This isn't really an answer, is it? Paul's "answer" is that you don't get to question God. God is God, and that means He gets to do what He wants!

Paul goes even further in **verse 21**...

Rom 9:21 Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one vessel for honorable use and another for dishonorable use?

There's no way around this. You can read it one thousand times and it still says the same thing. It says God is so sovereign over the **clay**:

- He makes some **vessels for honorable use**.
- He makes other vessels for **dishonorable use**.

And this brings us to Lesson 3...

LESSON 3: A BIBLICAL BALANCE: (PART I) THE POTTER IS SOVEREIGN OVER THE CLAY.

I understand what Paul is saying in **verse 21** is troubling:

- We don't want to think of God making dishonorable vessels.
- We want to think if there are dishonorable vessels, it's the vessel's fault...not God's.

And if you think this is troubling, it gets even worse in the next verse...

Rom 9:22 What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction, 23 in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory—

These verses identify two different vessels:

- **Verse 22** discusses vessels that reveal – **or make known** – God's **wrath** and justice,
- **Verse 23** discusses vessels that reveal – **or make known** – God's **mercy** and compassion.

God could destroy sinners as soon as we sin, but instead He's patient w/ us - or as Paul says - He **endures** us, to do one of two things:

- To pour out His wrath on some, as **verse 22** says.
- To show His mercy toward some, as **verse 23** says.

The word that's most troubling to us is the word **prepared**:

- **Verse 22** says God has **prepared some vessels for destruction**
- **Verse 23** says God has **prepared some vessels for glory**.

We don't like this for two reasons:

1. First, it seems like man has no free will.
2. Second, it seems like God creates **vessels** – or people – for destruction:
 - a. We don't like that b/c we want to think if vessels are punished, it's b/c they brought it on themselves.
 - b. We don't want to think of God preparing people for destruction...we want to think of people preparing themselves for destruction.

Earlier I talked about swinging the pendulum to one side, and these are the verses people use to defend double predestination, or the teaching that God predestines people to heaven AND hell. The problem w/ this is whenever predestination is discussed – **Rom 8:29-30** and **Eph 1:5** and **11** – it only discusses God predestining people to heaven. There are no verses about God predestining people to hell. We can't speak into silence.

Now, let me show you some other verses that bring some balance to this. Please turn to **2 Tim 2:20**...

2 Tim 2:20 Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable.

We're back to the exact same analogy Paul used in **Rom 9** of **honorable vessels** and **dishonorable vessels**. And in keeping w/ **Rom 9**, we would expect Paul to say God made them – or prepared them – to be honorable or dishonorable.

Nope.

Look what he says...

2 Tim 2:21 Therefore, IF ANYONE CLEANSSES HIMSELF from what is dishonorable, HE WILL BE A VESSEL FOR HONORABLE USE, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.

This literally says the exact opposite of **Rom 9**:

- **Rom 9** says God **prepares vessels** for honor.
- This verse says **if anyone cleanses himself he will be a vessel for honorable use**.

So which is it?

- Is God sovereign?
- Or is man a free moral agent?

It's both, and this brings us to Lesson 3...

LESSON 3: A BIBLICAL BALANCE: (PART II) THE CLAY CAN BE HARD OR SOFT IN THE POTTER'S HANDS.

I've told you a number of times that the OT looks forward to, or prefigures the NT. Sometimes the NT also looks back on and draws from the OT. That's what Paul is doing in **Rom 9** and **2 Tim 2**. Both of these accounts look back to the Potter and the Clay in **Jer 18**.

I think it's helpful to consider this illustration b/c of the healthy balance it creates for us...

- Obviously the Potter has power over the clay.
- But at the same time, the clay can be stiff or soft in the Potter's hands...

This is a theme throughout the OT. Here are a few verses:

- **Isa 64:8 O Lord, you are our Father; WE ARE THE CLAY, AND YOU ARE OUR POTTER; we are all the work of your hand.**
- **Isa 45:9a Woe to him who STRIVES WITH HIM WHO FORMED HIM, a pot among earthen pots!**
 - We're earthen pots – or vessels – so we have no right to **strive with** the God who **formed** us...but the point is people can fight against God.
 - They'll lose, but as free moral agents, they can still do it.

The Potter and the Clay is in **Jer 18**. Listen to what God says in the previous chapter to set up the illustration...

Jer 17:23 They did not listen or incline their ear, but STIFFENED THEIR NECK, that they might not hear and receive instruction.

God said they were hardening themselves against Him. It sounds off for Him to say this considering we know He – as the Potter – has power over the clay.

This theme is carried into the NT. Take your minds to Stephen's speech prior to his stoning. He rebukes the Jews by reminding them of their history. Then he says...

Acts 7:51 You STIFF-NECKED PEOPLE, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you.

He walked them through their history of stubbornness, and then used the Potter and the Clay to rebuke them.

The lesson for us is we want to strive to be soft and pliable in the Potter's hands...

It's easy to become hard and stiff when we feel like we don't like what God is doing w/ us, so let me encourage you:

- We want to remember God is for us. He wants to shape us into the image of His Son.
- When we fight against God, we're fighting against our own best interests.

And when we do that, we don't make things harder on God. We make things harder on ourselves.

Let me close w/ one final encouragement...

I don't expect this morning's sermon to resolve the debate between God's sovereignty and man's free will. We will inevitably continue to encounter truths that we find – at best – confusing – and – at worst – troublesome. When you reach those verses, look to those verses that give you a biblical balance and discuss God's goodness.

Lean on verses like this:

- **Gen 18:25b Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is right?"**
- **Psa 119:137 Righteous are you, O Lord, and right are your rules.**
- **Rev 19:2a His judgments are true and just.**

If you have any questions about anything I've taught this morning, or you need prayer for anything, Pastor Doug and I will be up front after service and we'd consider it a privilege to be able to speak w/ you.

Let's pray.