

Smart or dumb?

Intro

The Great Teacher was always partial to children, even in the midst of His mission to bring the New Kingdom into being. He thought of us all as children, in a sense¹, likely because we were not anywhere near as learned as He was². But He did not necessarily think of children as dumb. He claimed that they understood some things better than the rest of us, as though the important things in life were hidden from us³. They cried out that He was their Savior, much to the chagrin of the chief priests and teachers of the law, Christ responded with the scripture that predicted that praise would come from children and even infants⁴.

So He did not regard them as of less intelligence or of less importance. We did not really get it, though, and tried to protect Him when people brought their little children to Him to bless them and pray for them⁵. The Teacher straightened us out about that, as He carefully took the time to hold each one. Then He chided us for our attitude, and told us that we in welcoming them we welcomed Him⁶. Then He gave us the most incredible challenge of all: We were to become like these babies if we were ever to enter the kingdom⁷.

Ponder

I considered that idea as I worked to spread the news of the kingdom after He ascended. I figured out that being like a child does not really have anything to do with being “smart” or “dumb”. He desires in us the active, continual pursuit of learning and of growing up as works in a child. When I later found myself surrounded by children and their multitude of questions, in awe of everything and never afraid to ask about anything, I realized that this was the quality of life that we needed to have. Once we decide that we have it all figured out, then we fall⁸.

One of the reasons that the Pharisees and other enemies of Jesus reacted badly to this was that it mocked their great “learning”. Think about how they must have felt – Jesus said that children were “smarter” than they were! This was part of the rage that drove them to crucify the Christ. But, the wisdom of God was foolishness to men, and vice versa⁹.

Legion

After some years working my mission, I met someone that made me think more deeply about this issue. I found him out by himself, isolated from his home community¹⁰. At first he tried to hide from me, but as I did not act threateningly, he finally came to me and told me his story.

He did not have a demon, but was just “slow” or somewhat mentally limited. He had a strange look in his eyes, but as I talked to him I could see that there was Good in his heart. He was despised by those who lived around him, and they bullied without mercy. When I asked him his name, he told me that the people of the town just called him “Stupid”. He could not keep a job in the town, but he went around anyway trying to do service to people and exercise Good.

The local people who journeyed past looked at us very curiously, amazed that someone would spend so much time with the “village idiot”. The “child” and I talked about spiritual things, of which the town leaders considered themselves masters. After a time I rose to leave him, and he begged to go with me. But I sent him back home to tell the others how much God had done for them all. So the man went away and spread the word of the kingdom all over the region.

As I walked along the road, I began to wonder just how smart you have to be to be saved. I knew that none knew enough [ref who knowledge], actually, that is where Grace comes in. God has always worked to protect the weak (which is actually all mankind), and this includes those that are mentally weak. I found it difficult to see that God would punish us for not being smart enough to understand; for being “stupid”, in a sense. I could see that God would punish evil people – those who are so totally set against His basic principles. It is not about being **smart or dumb** – it is about good or evil!

The scriptures mention those that were called foolish¹¹, who were mostly willful and not really stupid. King David acted as though he were crazy in the presence of the king of Gath¹², who apparently saw plenty of crazy people and wanted no more. But of those that were mentally deficient, there is not much said. Perhaps the closest was the Teacher’s own story of the man who foolishly built his house on in a sandy gulch¹³. I realized, though, that the mentally slow should be in our list of groups that should not be prejudiced against¹⁴.

I remember that the Christ said on His cross, "Forgive them, for they do not know what they do..."¹⁵ This was an admission that we are all dumb, but He will forgive that because He is God. And as High Priest, He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant.¹⁶

Reflections with the Teacher

Later, when I visited the artist / teacher, she told me how that she had to deal with, and actually come to love, the children that had difficulty learning. Children have such a loving nature, she said; it was part of the joy of teaching. For instance, there was one child who could only use hand signs to communicate. As limited as he was, he still showed signs of growth, and small movements were the cause of great celebration. Such improvement was magnified through our compassion.

We all start as a baby – even Jesus did¹⁷. We grow at different rates, but we all start at the beginning. Everyone does not progress the same, but we must all be involved in the pursuit of intellectual and spiritual maturity¹⁸. We are all given a container of a certain size, and we must try to fill it up the best way we can [parable of talents]. God decides between smart and dumb: the most important thing is that we are capable of understanding Goodness and Love.

Can we be too dumb to be saved? Can any of us be smart enough to understand how we are saved? There is a huge difference between being "dumb" and "mean". Our fascination with knowledge, I think, is so we can see ourselves as "better" than others¹⁹. The artist told me that God doesn't want "scholars", but "hearts" or "lovers". We don't have to be a scholar, we just have to "get it" and go off to serve in love (as the teacher did with her kids).

Conclusion

So I then began to wonder what the penalty was for being dumb. How dumb do we have to be to not see the power of God?²⁰ It is not about knowing facts, but knowing God. We must be able to recognize "Good" based on the template of sacrifice and love that Christ provided. We must remove the veil that covers our minds so that we can see²¹.

We really only have to be smart about what is Good. We cannot control our intelligence, but we can choose to love Goodness and spread that to the people around us. We have to ignore our selfish motives, and love God / Good with all of our hearts²².

References

1. Mark 10:24
2. Isaiah 55:8-10 – "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.
3. Matthew 11:25 & Luke 10:21
4. Matthew 21:15-16
5. Matthew 19:13-14, Luke 18:15-16, & Mark 10:13-16
6. Mark 9:37 and Matthew 5
7. Matthew 18:3
8. 1 Corinthians 10:12
9. 1 Corinthians 1
10. there is some similarity to the story of Legion in Mark 5:1-20
11. Psalm 14:1
12. 1 Samuel 21:10-14
13. Matthew 7:26 (The Message)
14. Jew, Greek, slave, free, male, female; Galatians 3:28
15. Luke 23:34
16. Hebrews 5:1-2. this refers to the human high priest, but I believe it can be applied to Christ
17. Luke 2:52, where Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man
18. see Paul's comments about solid food, Hebrews 5:11-14
19. 1 Corinthians 8:1, knowledge puffs up, but love builds up
20. Isaiah 1:3. "The ox knows its master, the donkey its owner's manger, but Israel does not know, my people do not understand."

21. see 2 Corinthians 3; Having a veil over minds is basically a choice; see also Jeremiah 31:31;
remember how Elisha's servant was blind until he was permitted to see
22. Matthew 22:36-40, the greatest commandment

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