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HOW WILL YOU UNDERSTAND?

When Jesus began teaching in parables, it was very confusing for His disciples, as they did not understand why all of a sudden it seemed He was shrouding His message in code. "And the disciples came 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 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 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," Matt. 13:10-17. Jesus revealed that the ultimate reason He was teaching in parables was initially to weed out those faithless, curious followers who were merely hanging on out of confusion by who he was and just wanted to see what all the fuss was about. For them, the parables would diminish their faith even more so that even what little accurate knowledge of Him they had reluctantly come to accept would be abandoned, leading ultimately to their complete abandonment of Jesus and His message. For the true disciples who had come

believe in all confident faith that Jesus was indeed the prophesied Messiah, yet murky and confused in their understanding of what that meant, the parables would sharpen and increase their knowledge giving them a more accurate picture of what His true purpose was and even strengthening and increasing their faith to believe in and follow Him more closely and devoutly. For us, the question still remains, how are we hearing and how are we looking at Jesus? Do we see Him merely as a one dimensional figure who came to fulfill specific moments in history, or do we see him more three dimensionally as the One who time, space, dimension are completely filled with who governs all life and existence? How we see Him will ultimately shape how we see ourselves and even our own purpose and sense of mission. "And He said to them, 'Do you not understand this parable? How will you understand all the parables?'" Mk. 4:13. When Jesus asked this question, He was not merely referring to the specific parables of His own teaching, but the fact that they were designed to retrain how his own disciples looked at and understood even the Old Testament scriptures. Would they see them as merely a detailed chronological account of history, or would they see them as pictures and metaphors for who the Christ truly was? "For

just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth," Mt. 12:40. How about us? Will we understand all the parables, or will our hearts grow dull and scarcely hear? – Daniel Ruegg

IT'S NOT A SPRINT, IT'S A MARATHON A marathon is defined as "any long-distance race ... a foot race on a course measuring 26 miles, 385 yards." (*Webster's*). In defining the word "sprint," we learn that it is "to race or move at full speed, esp. for a short distance, as in running, rowing, etc." (*ibid.*). Just as the definitions for these words are different, so is the training for each sport. In sprinting, one wishes to get from point A to point B in the quickest time, expending all energy to get there before one's competitors. In the case of a marathon, one wishes to get from point A to point B as quickly as possible but must also realize that he cannot expend all energy in the beginning, or he will not even finish the race! In a marathon, one tries to build up to a certain speed and maintain a consistent pace for the rest of the race. If a sprinter and a marathoner were to race one another, a sprinter might outrun the marathon runner initially; but after a short distance, the sprinter is winded, while the marathon runner is just "hitting his stride," ready to run the rest of the race. Why are we making this contrast? It is because such an illustration fits the

lives of many Christians. It is unfortunate that some new Christians “burn out” rather quickly after becoming a Christian. These Christians are excited about having a new relationship with Christ and their brethren and wish to learn more and more. In fact, they are sincere in their desire to want to do all that they can for Christ. However, after a few months, they become tired (“winded”?) and realize that this particular course is longer than they thought. It is to last for the rest of their lives and they were not considering that possibility (I Cor. 15:58). It is impossible to run for a time and then “coast” on our momentum. We must keep moving, but some have already become “winded” and tired and have given up. Why does this happen? There might be several contributing factors, but ultimately, I believe a fact forgotten by many is that living as a Christian is a marathon, not a sprint! Hebrews 12:1 compares the life of a Christian to a race. We read, *“Therefore since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”* Notice that we are to run this race of life *“with endurance.”* This race will not be completed in a day or a week. The race a Christian runs demands that we endure for the rest of our lives (Matt. 10:22; II Tim. 2:3, 4:5; Jas. 5:11)! Are we conditioned and

trained in the right way? We need to be if we are to make this commitment to Christ. Furthermore, we read in II Timothy 4:7 the apostle Paul’s words that he has *“finished the race.”* When did his “race” end? It ended at his death. He realized he was soon to die and understood that his “marathon” was quickly coming to a close. Yet, he also understood that he could not let up in his running. This is because he knew that if he had preached the truth to others but did not himself obey it, he would be *“a castaway”* (I Cor. 9:24-27). These are but a few passages that compare a man’s life to a race completed at death. Yes, friends, let us appreciate the fact that a Christian’s life is a marathon that demands our endurance, faithfulness, and stamina if we will see Heaven! Living as a Christian is a marathon, not a sprint. As Christians, why don’t we take the time to examine ourselves (II Cor. 13:5) and make sure we are still running the race as we ought? Perhaps you have become “winded,” downtrodden, and just want to give up. Take this opportunity to return to the Lord and renew your commitment to the race that leads us from earth to Heaven. Remember that there are folks who are cheering you on in this marathon (Heb. 12:1). They want you to succeed, but they cannot run the race for you! We all have a race to run! – Jarrod Jacobs

FIFTH SUNDAY PHOTOS

Every fifth Sunday of the month, we try to highlight some of great things happening around our congregation that were captured through photography. If you happen to get a good picture of one of those great things, please feel free to post it on our Facebook page, tag us on Instagram (@wellsburgchurch), tweet us at @wellsburgchurch, or e-mail us at minister@wellsburgchurchofchrist.com with a little description of what is happening in the picture.



Callie and Carlin mark 6 months with their little brother, Rylan! We rejoice with the Minor family in their wonderful blessings!



Makena and Kate enjoy a winter wonderland to play in from the avalanche of snow we received in Snowpocalypse 2022!



Gideon sets the trends with his dapper style! Always ready with a smile, Gideon spreads joy to everyone he greets! Thank you for your great heart, we love you Gideon!



The Prager family steps out in the snow to brave the frigid weather for a family pose! Such a perfect beautiful setting for a beautiful family!