

## “God’s Word is a Puzzle”

Heb. 2:1-13

Last Sunday during Bible class, I had mentioned that certain translations of the Bible are better than others. And relying solely on English translations, and not the original Greek and Hebrew, can cause problems – which is why these ancient languages are still a requirement at our seminaries. Most places the Bible translators do a good job, but it is certain verses where they sometimes choose their words poorly.

The danger comes when someone reads a poorly translated verse and then makes the mistake of studying the Bible one verse at a time – and ignore the context or the rest of Scripture. Failure to see each Bible passage as a different thread of the same tapestry will undoubtedly lead a person to a misunderstanding, if not outright unbelief.

The words of our Epistle lesson offer a prime example. In the NIV, the translation that we use to use, but changed for a multitude of reasons, in Hebrews 2:9, the NIV version could be used as a proof text that Jesus Christ is not true God, and that the beliefs of the Christian church are obviously wrong. In the NIV, the letter to the Hebrews states: “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death.”

Jesus was made a little lower than the angels? Didn't we just make the confession of faith in the Nicene Creed that Jesus was "begotten, not made;" that He was "the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of His Father before all worlds"; that He is eternal and "of one substance with the Father."

The problem is not the text itself. The problem actually is found in the translation. In the NIV, and some other translations, the word order gets misapplied. Fear not, I am not going to give you a lesson on sentence structure in Greek and English. In the ESV (The English Standard Version) which we now use in our readings, and in the NAB (the New American Standard Bible – another very good literal translation) the verse reads, "But we see Him who for a little while was made lower than the angels." Well, that changes everything.

Jesus was made a little lower than the angels but is still all of these things that we confess in the creed, because His humiliation was only for "a little while." But no matter what translation of the Bible we read (and none of them are perfect), because the nuances of Greek and Hebrew do not always translate into English, like all of Scripture, Hebrews chapter 2:9 must be interpreted within the context of the entire Bible.

There are no contradictions to be found in the different passages of Holy Scripture, or between Holy Scripture and the creeds of the church. But then why have there been so many wrong ideas and false teachings throughout the history of the church?

In the early church period, a few hundred years after Christ's death and resurrection, there was a very popular bishop named Arius (I have

talked about him before) who taught that Jesus was not true God; that He was not the eternal, only-begotten Son of God; that He was a god-like creature, similar to but not the same as God, made by God at some point in the creation process. It was against Arius that the Nicene Creed was written. The Jehovah Witnesses and the Mormons today say essentially the same thing as Arius, and the Mormons, officially, are in agreement with Arius' low view of Christ.

It is often asked, how can such differing views be held by people who read the same Bible? Interpreting the Bible is a lot like putting together a 10,000 piece jigsaw puzzle. When you first dump out the 10,000 pieces, it seems like an insurmountable task. Where do you start? This piece of blue; is it sky or is it water? What is the first step? Well, the first step is to look at the cover of the box to see what the people who created this puzzle intend for it to look like when you get done with it.

In Baptism, we are given all 10,000 pieces of the puzzle. Our faith is complete. There is nothing more that we need. We have seen the cover of the box, we just aren't quite sure how it all fits together yet. The creeds, and confessions of the church like Luther's Catechism, are like the cover of the box; they are guides for seeing how God's Word fits together. It is good to have that basic overview of what the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have done for you. And for many generations, these writings have been shown to be in complete harmony with God's Word.

Therefore, if you hear a Bible passage being interpreted in such a way that it contradicts one of the creeds or confessions of faith, then we know

that someone may be trying to put that piece of the puzzle in the wrong place. This is your opportunity to help them understand the truth. Today, we are recognizing the work of the LWML. Mission work is not just sending money overseas. Mission work starts here, in our homes, among your friends. As Yogi Berra said, "Wherever you go, there you are." Wherever you go, that is where you do your mission work.

Now, when you are putting a jigsaw puzzle together, different people have different strategies; some start at the bottom, some at the top; but no matter what strategy you use, one thing is necessary: time. No one is going to put the puzzle together in 5 minutes. But that is about as much time as many people give God and His Word.

How many people give God's Word more than five minutes a day, or even five minutes a week? When you buy a jigsaw puzzle, how many of you would give up after five minutes and say: "I can't figure this out"? But this is what people do with God's Word.

How many of you, after giving up on putting the puzzle together, would cut the picture out of the front of the box, frame it, and proudly display this accomplishment? No one would do that, yet this is how we treat God's Word. People, who have no idea what the Bible says, have their picture of Jesus proudly displayed in their living room for all to see.

There is certainly nothing wrong with having a picture of Christ in the living room. I am a big fan of icons. But in our homes, Christ needs to be found elsewhere than just on the wall.

God has given us all the pieces of the puzzle. If we do not take the

time to work at putting the puzzle together, but put it on a shelf or in closet (only later to be sold at a garage sale), or if we throw it away while doing our spring cleaning, then we have done what most of the people throughout the history of the world have done. In doing this we take the most valuable of all our possessions and treat it as rubbish or as something not worthy of our time.

It is my prayer that you spend time with God's Word. Don't say, "It's too confusing to read." Or "I don't want to come to Bible class because then the other people will know that I don't know all these answers." None of us know all the answers. None of us have all the pieces of the puzzle put together. And we won't so long as we live in this world.

It is the process of working at the puzzle that allows you to grow in your understanding of God and what He has done for you – as the picture is revealed more and more throughout the process. The fullness of God – the complete picture of who He is and what He has done is something no one can fully understand. We make no claim to understanding the fullness of God with our feeble minds. But, in His Word, God has given you all the pieces of a puzzle that you are able to work at putting together if you only take the time.

Spend some time with God's Word. He has revealed Himself to you. And He has given you the picture of your salvation. Amen.