

Scripture: Mark 8:10-21

Text: Mark 8:15

### Watch Out for the Leaven!

Beloved in Christ, Jesus, in Mark 8:10-21, is still talking about bread. Jesus and His disciples, however, are talking about two different kinds of bread. The disciples are lamenting the shortage of bread in the boat, only having one loaf for the thirteen of them. Jesus on the other hand is warning them about *“the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.”*

Usually we think of leaven as a wonderful gift of God. It is. Yeast is a leaven that ferments, causing bread dough to rise. It makes bread soft and tasty. But here Jesus talks about leaven in the negative sense. In verse 15, He is warning His disciples, *“Take heed! Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees...”* What is that leaven He warns His disciples about? He means their teaching, their doctrine [Matthew 16:12]. It’s a corrupting influence.

Why use this image of yeast or leaven to describe their teaching? Like leaven, though you can’t see it, you see its effects. Second, like leaven, it spreads. Third, like leaven, it powerfully influences; in this case, an influence that corrupts. In 1 Corinthians 5:6, for example, the apostle Paul addresses sin in the body of Christ and says, *“a little leaven leavens the whole lump... therefore, purge out the old leaven....”*

Jesus is continuing to train and teach His disciples to discern what they hear in light of who He is. In light of verse 15, Jesus warns them and also us to be careful, to watch out for bad leaven! We see

1. The occasion for this warning [vv.10-13]
2. The concern in this warning [vv.14-16]
3. The call in this warning [vv.17-21]

#### 1. The occasion for this warning [vv.10-13]

So, what is the occasion which gives rise to this warning? For that we need to go back to **verses 10-13** and then see how it applies to us today, as the congregation of Jesus in 2019. Jesus and His disciples were on the east side of the Sea of Galilee, in Gentile territory. They go into a boat to cross over the sea to the region of Dalmanutha on the western side of the Sea of Galilee [**verse 10**].

And who meets Jesus and the disciples? There they are again; the Pharisees testing Christ, challenging His authority, His Word. Here it’s the Pharisees who come out. It’s they who take the initiative, not Jesus. And we read in **verse 11** that they begin to dispute with Him; that is, argue and question Jesus. They are seeking; literally, demanding [that’s the meaning here!] from Him a sign from heaven! They are demanding proofs, visible proofs, to prove that He is who He claims to be.

They are saying, ‘Give us proofs!’ This reminds us of what the apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1:22, *“For Jews request a sign . . . but we preach Christ crucified..”* That’s the Pharisees here – demanding a sign. But it’s not because they want to believe. Like the devil, who tempted Jesus in the wilderness, they are saying this to tempt Jesus. They want Him to fall. They want to discredit Him publicly.

But there He is before them, the Son of God, from heaven. Isn’t He the sign from heaven? But they don’t believe. They won’t believe. And even if Jesus did perform a sign, they still will not believe.

They would probably attribute the source of His sign to Beelzebub, the ruler of demons, as they did in Mark 3. [illustration]

How does Jesus respond [verse 12]? *“He sighed deeply in His spirit.”* Why so? 1] Jesus has given so many proofs, “infallible proofs” [Acts 1:3], that He was sent by the Father, as foretold by the Old Testament prophets. Jesus had filled the land with proofs, with many and various signs: healing the sick, cleansing the leper, stilling the waves, casting out demons, raising the dead, and multiplying the bread. And the Pharisees are asking for another sign? [!!] It’s like mom baking home made cookies all day, and, after seeing all the assortments of home made cookies, the child asking, ‘Mom, when are you going to bake home made cookies?’

But 2] Jesus also had great sorrow over their unbelief. That’s also why He sighed deeply. Their request reveals their hardness of heart. And this wounded Jesus deeply. The problem is not a lack of a sign but a lack of faith. They are not seeing by faith! Jesus says, *“Why does this generation seek a sign? Assuredly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation.”* In other words, “no sign such as you are demanding shall at all be given.”

There’s a point if one doesn’t see it, you just have to walk away. That’s what Jesus does. We read in **verse 13**, that *“He left them.”* He leaves them to their own destiny which they have chosen for themselves. He got *“into the boat again, and departed to the other side.”* Again, they go to the east side of the Sea of Galilee.

Now Jesus is with His disciples. He spends time with them and teaches them to discern the things they were hearing. He expresses great concern to His disciples. What is it?

## **2. The concern in His warning [vv.14-16].**

They are in the boat and there is this little detail in **verse 14**, but it is important. What did the disciples forget? They forgot to take bread. They didn’t have more than one loaf in the boat with them for thirteen men.

They are concerned, worried that He might not be pleased that they did not have more than one loaf. But that’s the least of Jesus’ concerns. His concern is much deeper. He warns them in **verse 15**, *“Take heed! Beware! of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.”* Watch out for their teaching. It can easily spread and corrupt. You hear others; you begin to raise questions and even doubt.

The leaven of the Pharisees and of [king] Herod can be religious or political. Both the Pharisees and Herod are united in their opposition to Jesus. That’s how they are the same. Their opposition to Jesus is a result of their unbelief in Jesus, and their unbelief is also influencing, even fermenting among the disciples in the boat. Their minds cannot avoid it; it’s the things they’ve been hearing all their life. His disciples were living among an unbelieving generation.

So are we. So are our children. It’s so easy to be influenced by the leaven of people, the world around us: the talk, the music, the movies, the thinking and values of our culture. But are we evaluating the things that we see and hear? Are we aware how toxic the leaven of unbelief is – far more toxic than drinking Coca-cola every day! Jesus strongly warns His disciples: *“Take heed, beware of the leaven...”*

The twelve needed this warning. In spite of their association with Jesus daily, they were not seeing the danger. They were not alert to the danger. That happens easily. That's why Jesus gives the warning: Watch out! Be on guard against.

Notice, in **verse 16**, Jesus did not leave the opposition behind with the Pharisees on the lake shore. It's with Him in the boat. He sees the powerful corrupting influence of this leaven. Their misunderstanding of Jesus' reference to the yeast or leaven shows that. They are not seeing the danger. The disciples began reasoning among themselves, *"It is because we have no bread."* They're not thinking 'teaching' but literal bread that you eat. They are thinking that Jesus is saying 'don't accept bread from the Pharisees and from Herod.'

They were not hearing properly. But there is more. Because of their misunderstanding, they thought Jesus was not happy with them because they forgot to take bread along and was worried about not enough bread. But Jesus had just multiplied bread among the 5000 and then later among the 4000! He had given proof of His power! Could He not take the one loaf they had and multiply that? In Mathew's version, Jesus calls them "men of little faith" [Matthew 16:8].

In light of Jesus concern, we hear Jesus' call in verses 17-21. This brings us to our third point.

### **3. Jesus' call in this warning [vv.17-21]**

If you are watching out for the leaven of the Pharisees, that means that you are listening to Jesus. That's how you watch out for the leaven of the world today. As a congregation, we do so by listening to Christ, by taking His Word for truth and believing it. If we see the danger, we want training from Jesus and we want to train our children! Jesus calls us to continue to come back to Him, to listen to Him, to believe, and to trust in Him, even if the whole world is saying something different.

Jesus' goes on the counter-offensive. That's what His word does. It opens our eyes to see the leaven. The Pharisees are not the only problem. The disciples don't get it either. So Jesus calls them to faith in Him, by strongly rebuking them with a series of seven questions:

*"Why do you reason because you have no bread? Do you not perceive or understand? Is your heart still hardened? Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments did you take up? And they said to Him, 'Twelve.' Also, when I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of fragments did you take up? And they said, 'Seven.' So He said to them, 'How is it you do not understand'?"*

Wow. What a stinging rebuke from their Savior! They aren't seeing, nor hearing, nor understanding as they should. These questions go to show that we need the miracle of sight, of hearing, of understanding! He's not saying His disciples don't have it, but He's addressing their darkness, their deafness and their dullness and calling them to faith in Him. As one commentator says, "the disciples are anxious about the lack of bread, but Jesus anxious about their lack of faith."

Ultimately, Jesus reveals their need and our need for Him who will break the power of blindness, deafness and dullness through His sacrifice of Himself on the cross for our sins and His resurrection to life! And He will pour out His Spirit on the church who opens eyes, ears and hearts through the preaching of the gospel. He says later to His disciples in John 14:26, *"The Helper, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you."*

We live in these days -today. The Spirit has been poured out. We have God's Word. Through faith in Christ, you have the Holy Spirit, as God's beloved, so that you see the danger of the leaven of the world. He gives you eyes to see and ears to hear. Also the good news is that the leaven of the Word in you is greater, more powerful in its influence, than the old leaven of sin, as you grow in Christ and His Word. This how Christ immunizes you in the way of salvation – as He teaches you to evaluate and discern what you hear. This is your only counter-offensive to the leaven of the world.

Consider the parable of the leaven in Matthew 13:33. It remains active until the whole batch of dough is permeated. May the leaven of the gospel of Christ, the crucified and risen Christ, permeate your life, the life of our congregation, and the world in which we live! By believing in Christ, your eyes are open, ears unstopped!

And what about that one loaf in the boat with His disciples? Jesus is that one loaf, who offers Himself as nourishment for all who embrace Him by repenting of their sins and believing in Him. Share the bread, the Bread of life. His teaching, His kingdom, is true leaven! Amen.