

Mark 8:11-22 (NKJV)

¹¹ Then the Pharisees came out and began to dispute with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, testing Him. ¹² But He sighed deeply in His spirit, and said, "Why does this generation seek a sign? Assuredly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation." ¹³ And He left them, and getting into the boat again, departed to the other side. ¹⁴ Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, and they did not have more than one loaf with them in the boat. ¹⁵ Then He charged them, saying, "Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." ¹⁶ And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "*It is* because we have no bread." ¹⁷ But Jesus, being aware of *it*, said to them, "Why do you reason because you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart still hardened? ¹⁸ Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember? ¹⁹ When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments did you take up?" They said to Him, "Twelve." ²⁰ "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." ²¹ So He said to them, "How *is it* you do not understand?"

Now, Jesus had just fed another 20,000 people using just a few fish and crackers. It was well known that he was healing people and casting out demons. Think about that. If you knew someone who was doing all this, what is the last thing in the world you would ask someone like this to do?

Probably it is exactly what the religious leaders **did**.

What we are going to see this morning are two kinds of blindness. There is permanent lethal blindness from rebellious hearts, and the temporary blindness in the hearts of believers. At times they may look the same. But they are drastically different. One is destined to remain blind. The other is destined to see.

¹¹ Then the Pharisees came out and began to dispute with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, testing Him.

Matthew tells us more.

Matthew 16:1-4 (NKJV)

¹ Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven

Do you remember when we began this study what we learned about the Pharisees and Sadducees? They hated each other. It would be similar to the environment we face today between Democrats and Republicans. They both want to be in power but they differ fundamentally on the solutions to the

problems. So what we see here would be similar to a coalition of democrats and republicans, coming to question a religious leader suspected of having political power. Now, what is the only thing that would cause that to happen in our world? **Fear of losing power.** Anyone who appears to be a threat to their power was going to be attacked. These religious rulers were being threatened on two fronts. They were going to lose power to lead the people on spiritual issues and they were going to lose political power. And neither side was willing to give that up. So they came together to silence a common enemy. Jesus Christ.

Neil Young is a singer/songwriter who was popular when I was young. He isn't exactly a monument of truth. But I saw him being interviewed on tv once. The interviewer asked him his thoughts on world peace. What he said was very poignant. He said in his opinion **the only thing that would bring about world peace was a common enemy.**

In the end times, depending on your view of eschatology, there is going to be a short period of world peace under the rule of the anti-christ. Nothing brings the world together more than a basic hatred of God's authority over their lives. This is coming.

Well, we see that principle lived out this morning in our text. The enemies of Christ have come together to kill Christ. They are just looking for opportunity. Jesus is now back in Jewish territory. He had been in Gentile territory for several months. He is now in range of the Jewish leaders.

As soon as he gets within range, they are after him like a pack of dogs, looking for a weakness.

Back to our text-

¹¹ Then the Pharisees came out and began to dispute with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, testing Him.

OK, the Pharisees and Sadducees are badgering Christ with questions. We can rest assured that this was not one of those discussions where one tries to understand another's position or tries to arrive at truth. These questions were intended to condemn Christ.

Now it says they were seeking from Christ a sign from heaven. There is some evidence that the Jewish leaders believed and taught that **earthly miracles** could be duplicated by the devil, much as the men in **Pharoah's court** could duplicate what **Moses** did. But they believed that **a miracle done in the skies** could not be duplicated and therefore would prove Christ's Godly origin.

So they were egging him on to do such a thing, as if they were trying to sincerely test Christ's source of power and authority. Well, had they been paying attention

they would probably already know about the sign from heaven when Christ was baptized. They would probably also know about the winds and the waves stopping immediately. But, these men were not looking for proof that Christ was true. They were invested in finding proof that Christ was false. At the end of the day, nothing would convince them otherwise. They were sold out to the evil they were doing.

Have you ever dealt with a person who is committed to seeing things the way they see them? No amount of arguing, no logical presentation of evidence is going to change their minds. As a new believer, I would not have believed that was true. I believe it now. It is a miracle, and only a miracle, when a person sees the light, when they are drawn to Christ. Human reason is used in the process, but human reason does not cause it. It responds to God's call.

Let's look at Christ's response in Matthew before we go to our text in Mark.

Matthew 16:2-4 (NKJV) . ² He answered and said to them, "When it is evening you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red'; ³ and in the morning, 'It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot *discern* the signs of the times. ⁴ A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah." And He left them and departed.

We have probably all heard the saying, "Red in the morning, sailors take warning". "Red at night, sailors delight". Well, that is actually in the Bible and here it is.

So the Pharisees ask for a sign from heaven. In turn, Jesus talks about the heavens. He essentially tells them they know more about the physical heavens weather than spiritual heaven's reality. They know more about physical existence than spiritual existence. Essentially their understanding of the heavens is limited to weather forecasts. They know what it means when they see things in the physical sky. But they know nothing of what it means when they see world events unfolding all around them. Essentially, the things they are responsible for they know nothing about. They are better weathermen than workmen in the word of God. They don't know how scripture fits into world events.

Then Christ tells them what He thinks of their requests for a sign. He is essentially calling the status of the current Jewish nation and leadership as wicked and adulterous. He could not have been more deeply offensive. And He could not have been more accurate. What He said was exactly true. And He said it to people who would just find it as one more reason to hate Him.

He says here that the sign of Jonah would be given to them. That would be Christ's death and resurrection. But of course, they had no idea what He was talking about. Then Christ left them.

Now to our text in Mark

¹² But He sighed deeply in His spirit, and said, "Why does this generation seek a sign? Assuredly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation."

Sighed deeply means to draw a sigh from the bottom of your chest. We all know what this is like. We hear news that is deeply distressing. We cannot help but giving expression to that which is too troubling to be hidden. That is what Christ experiences here. How distressing. How disturbing. How depressing. These men, who were supposed to be the guides, were trying to kill the Son of God. Essentially the majority of people in this generation were about to perish eternally. There is no sign that would **ever change** their destination. It isn't like God was guilty for not giving enough proof. They will be found guilty for having hearts that would not respond to God's love.

The problem can be found in Christ's question. **Why** does this generation seek a sign? The answer is clearly that it is **not because** they want to show their love for God? They don't want to **know His will**. They don't want to **submit to His Lordship**. No. They ask for a sign because they are intent on killing the son of God. And that is why no sign is necessary. It would not accomplish anything good.

This is always the status of the truly spiritually blind. They cannot see. They don't want to see. And they will never see, no matter how bright you shine the light. Now, was no sign given? Well, none of the signs they were looking for was given. But they were given signs that **those who looked for** them could easily see. They were given enough evidence that they should be able to discern Jesus's origin. Now let's move on to those who are capable of seeing the light but aren't seeing it.

¹³ And He left them, and getting into the boat again, departed to the other side.

¹⁴ Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, and they did not have more than one loaf with them in the boat. ¹⁵ Then He charged them, saying, "Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." ¹⁶ And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "*It is because we have no bread.*"

OK, so Christ was on the west side of the Sea of Galilee in Jewish territory. He immediately leaves. Maybe He left in a hurry. Maybe the disciples were distraught with the situation. Whatever the case, they forgot to do something that they knew they had to do. It was their job to get food and bring it along.

So, what do you think was running around in their minds?

It is the same thing that runs through **our minds** when **we** mess up.

Uh oh. I didn't do my job. I wonder if I can hide that fact. I wonder if I can pick up some bread as soon as we land so Christ **won't know** I messed up. But in the mean time, I sure wish I had some food to eat.

We, as humans, are all messed up. None of us are truly objective. We all hear what we hear through the sieve of **our failures** and **insecurities** and **sensitivities**. Human relationships are far more of an art than they are a science.

To those who are married.... What is normally the source of your problems in your relationship? From what I have seen, it is when I hear **what wasn't said** or **say what wasn't heard**. I assume meanings and intentions **Carla** assumes meanings and intentions. And often times our assumptions come from our own failures and fears. We suspect motives that the other party may or may not have. We read things in that we shouldn't and we miss hearing the things that we should. Why? Because we have issues of our own that cloud our perceptions. They distort reality. They fog communications.

It is extremely difficult to listen well. Very few people ever master that skill. Truly listening involves getting outside of one's self. It involves putting aside our agendas and fears and dislikes. It involves casting aside the need to remember the next thing we are going to say. To truly listen is a very loving thing. And to be truly heard as a human is a wonderful thing.

So is this psychological noise that blurs our hearing anything new? Not hardly. We see a perfect example of it this morning.

What does Christ say?

"Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod."

Then this command goes to committee. What is heard? **You guys forgot bread**. Yep. That is typical human behavior. That is how we typically listen to one another.

Now look what Jesus is saying. What he is saying is very important. It is something they needed to know. It is something **we** need to know. But because the disciples were so hard hearted, they completely missed this lesson at this time. This could have been a very good teaching opportunity. But it was completely lost because of their response.

How many times has this happened to you? You are speaking to someone. You know you are getting to the heart of a very important matter. But the person you are speaking to suddenly becomes absorbed with some other perception. Maybe they are offended at something you said or **the way** that you said it or **when** you

said it. And you know immediately that you are never going to get back to the important matter in this conversation. It will have to wait for a future time. Like I said earlier. It is so hard to listen well. And it is triply so when someone is telling us about ourselves.

We do well to put off our objections to style and timing to another time if it is possible. It is good for us to listen, really listen, even if the person who is telling us these things is not good at making their points. Maybe they are not even good with reason. Maybe they are completely tactless. But they are making a sincere effort to tell us something.

These guys missed a very important lesson because they weren't listening. And what was the lesson?

"Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod."

Christ was warning them about polluting influences. These are influences, patterns of thought, that if introduced, will end up corrupting the whole lump of whatever it is introduced into. In other places in scripture it is compared to sin. Now what is the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod? This could be a whole other study on its own. But it is essentially mixing and confusing worldly ideas with spiritual ones, worldly behaviors with spiritual ones. For the Pharisees, they had a code of physical behavior that they equated with spirituality. And then on top of that, they, like all legalists, act very hypocritically. They say one thing and close examination shows that they do another.

Herod, on the other hand, **claimed** a spiritual status, but his behavior did not have **to comply** to that status. He thought he could be ok with God even though his life was not at all submitted to God.

The Sadducees, who Matthew includes in this list, compromise on truth. They don't have absolutes from God that determine their path. They accept the world's tools as a way to accomplish God's ends.

All three confused political power and spiritual power. All three thought political power was a way to further the kingdom of God.

I think if Jesus were personally discipling us today He would say the same thing. Beware the danger of thinking political success will somehow further spiritual success. I have a friend who I differ politically with dramatically. But I think he is correct in his assessment of the harm that we have done to the message of Christ. Liberally minded people think the gospel and right winged politics are joined at the hip. So people who think that the government should provide more services to their citizens than conservatives think is prudent are essentially, left out. We

have created an unnecessary obstacle for them. And it isn't like conservative politicians have been stellar role models in the world of morality.

We would do well **to not allow the yeast** of mixing our proclamation of spiritual truth and our political views. We will not further the kingdom of God, even if all the most conservative politicians win the day. Maybe we will be more prosperous, but really, what has that done for the gospel in the lives of those who prosper?

The best way to measure the spiritual value of something is to ask how many more people will be in the kingdom as a result of the effort. It is unwise to invest so much hope in politics. It will never further the kingdom of God. The idea that it will is an instance of the Pharisee's leaven.

Anyway, this is the lesson **they missed** in our text this morning. But it is repeated several times in the recorded record. So they eventually got it.

¹⁷ **But Jesus, being aware of it, said to them, "Why do you reason because you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart still hardened?"** ¹⁸ **Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember?** ¹⁹ **When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments did you take up?"** They said to Him, "Twelve." ²⁰ **"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." ²¹ **So He said to them, "How is it you do not understand?"**

At this point, Jesus addresses the disciple's current problem. He is showing his exasperation with them. He had to wonder when they would ever get the real point.

And why?

Is it because they are stupid?

Is it simply because they misunderstand?

No, the problem is the state of their hearts. Their hearts are still hardened so they do not hear what is said. They don't perceive and understand. They don't look at the facts and add them up to understand what God is after.

They can quote the facts. They can tell the stories. But they still cannot apply those truths to their lives when they find themselves in a pinch.

How much like **us** is that?

We know so many facts about God. We can even teach all the stories about God. But when the least little thing happens that puts us into stress, we don't understand. We miss the point. We have no clue. We forget what we know. Look at the reasoning Jesus uses.

Based on the disciple's response, the disciples' assumption must have been that Jesus really cared about not having any bread. That looks like projection to me. Projection is when we assume that another person is driven by the same things that we are. So, since we would care about bread if we were in charge, then Jesus must be concerned about bread.

But Jesus shows how stupid that thinking is.

He reminds them of the facts about Himself. That is always what we need when we are not thinking right.

And notice what Christ reveals. The disciples already had the facts about the situation. In essence, they **knew enough to know better**. They already possessed the facts that would correct their thinking.

How many baskets of bread were left after I first fed the crowd out of nothing? 12

How many baskets of bread were left after I fed the crowd the second time? 7

And you think I care about bread **why???**

So how is it that you do not understand?

Nothing has changed from then to now with people, with us.

How is it that **we** don't understand?

There are plenty of things that we think God really cares about but He really doesn't.

There are lots of things we are bent out of shape about, but God doesn't care about those things. We want them because we want them, not because God wants them for us. Sometimes we believe **God** wants them, but he **doesn't**. And those things only serve as **a distraction** from those things that God **really does want**.

Is there something in your life like that? Is there something you really care about, something you see as a spiritual thing, but you have reason to know **it really isn't**?

Maybe you think as a good Christian everyone should think positively about you?

Maybe you think no one should know about your sin because it would make them think less of Christ. We can all get stuck on things we think are spiritually important, but they really aren't. But those things are distractions.

Bring to memory what you know about God. Does He say those things are important? What is it distracting you **from**? What important thing are you **missing** by focusing on this distraction?

(Ultimately the most important thing is your relationship with Christ. If you are here this morning and do not know if you are right with God, that is the priority)