

Matthew 16:5-12

The Danger of the Leaven of False Teaching

We are in Matthew 16:5-12. Last time we met together we took verses 1-4, The Proof from Heaven, as two groups the Sadducees and the Pharisees - two religious groups within the Hebrew and Jewish religion - joined forces. They are usually opponents, they usually disagree on everything, but they have joined forces, uniting themselves against Jesus Christ. They came together and they asked Jesus to provide proof as a sign from heaven.

We studied from verses 1-4, that there are two kinds of signs, or miracles, presented in the Scripture: (1) confirmation signs and (2) authorization signs.

Jesus did signs to confirm that He was the promised coming Messiah. The Jews based these confirmation signs on Exodus chapters 4 through 11, where God gave Moses certain signs, or miracles, to perform in order to confirm to the Jewish people that God had sent Moses to be their deliverer. Jesus Himself, according to Matthew, as we studied so far in the book, Jesus performed His miracles according to the prophecies of Isaiah and Isaiah prophesied that when the Messiah comes, He would do certain miracles; and Jesus made reference back to Isaiah's prophecies and pointed to Himself as being the one who is fulfilling them. Confirmation miracles and confirmation signs.

But we also saw that even false prophets and false Christs are able to perform signs and wonders, Matthew 24:24. Even the antichrist is said to be going to have the ability to perform signs and wonders and deceive many, II Thessalonians 2:9-10. And people admit, people come to the point where they say, "Well, Jesus performed miracles, but Satan can perform miracles too. But if somebody performs miracles in the name of Jesus, that is from the Lord, totally and completely." The problem with that is that Jesus told us in Matthew 7:21-23 that many people will come to Him and say, "Lord, Lord, did we not do many miracles in Your name?" And Jesus said, "I will say to them, 'Depart from me for I never knew you.'" So, people can even perform miracles using Jesus' name and it not be from the Lord. That is a very scary thing, something to be cautious over. Do not get taken in just because there is a miracle. Satan can perform miracles. The Holy Spirit performs miracles. Many times from the Old Testament Satan duplicated the miracles that God's Spirit did. That is a very scary situation. So, someone would say, "Then how do we know the difference?"

Well, first of all, you have to test the spirit; but if a spirit performing a miracle is not from the Lord and it is from Satan, that miracle will draw you to the miracles. That miracle will draw you to the signs and wonders, you will start following signs and wonders. You will start seeking miracles of healings all the time, it will not bring you to Jesus. When Jesus performed miracles, He drew people to Himself. He was confirming who He was and then after He performed the miracles, He told them, "From now on, you have to live by faith." That is why a lot of people did not want to walk any longer with Jesus, because He only performed miracles in order to show people who He was. From then on, they had to trust Him by faith and they did not want to do that. They wanted the miracles. They wanted the signs and wonders.

So, *confirmation* is the first kind of signs and wonders, or miracles, in the Scriptures. Even Satan can perform those. But then here in our text, the *authorization* signs and wonders. They asked Jesus to prove Himself for who He is with a sign from out of heaven. That is different than the miracles that He has been doing. They have seen His healings. They have seen His miracles for two years. But now they are asking Him to show proof from heaven. Nothing from man, but something directly coming from God from out of heaven.

Again, based on Scriptures, the Jews would use authorization signs.

You remember Elijah in I Kings 18:19-39, Elijah challenged the prophets of Baal and put a sacrifice up on the altar and said, "If your God is real, have him call down fire from heaven and consume this sacrifice. No hocus-pocus. No man laying hands on, or praying, or whatever. Call God out of heaven. Let Him show you a proof from heaven." But then when it came to Elijah's turn, of course their gods would not answer. He said, "God, show that you are the true God of Israel," and fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifice, consumed the altar, and everybody knew that Elijah's God was the true and the living God.

Even in the New Testament, Matthew 3:16-17, when John the Baptist was told to go baptize and that he would know when he's face-to-face with the Messiah when he should see the Holy Spirit come down from heaven and land upon Him. And that happened in Matthew 3:16, but also in Matthew 3:17, then there was a voice from out of heaven, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Authorization directly from heaven, from God, and by God Himself.

So, in verse 4 we are told Jesus said, "A wicked and adulterous generation seeks for signs." Be careful of being a sign seeker. Jesus said that is wickedness and adultery, spiritual adultery. The only sign that is going to be given to this generation is the sign of Jonah. We know the Scriptures teach that Jonah is a type of the resurrection of Christ. "For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." And Jesus will be raised. And when Jesus was raised from the dead, it was not because anybody prayed. It was not because anybody laid hands on the tomb. He was raised by God, directly from heaven. So, He says, "That will be the only sign." That is authorization of who Jesus is, would be the fact that He is raised from the dead. The proof from heaven they wanted to know. He said, "There won't be any, except the resurrection from the dead."

For today, The Perception of Religious Leaven.

Verse 5, the circumstance involved, **And when His disciples had come to the other side, they forgot to take bread.** So, they went by ship and came to the other side. In Mark's gospel, in Mark 8:14 it tells us that when they left the shore on the other side, they had a partial loaf of bread with them in the boat. By the time they get over now to the other side, they did not take enough bread. That is what the text tells us.

Now, the commands in verse 6, **And Jesus said to them, "Take heed (or more literally, watch) and beware from the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees."** The two commands: (1) take heed, which literally means *watch, be observant*; and (2) beware from the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

Interesting the first word *watch* means *to be observant to the people from the outside of you*. Be observant to what comes into you from the outside. The second thing is the word *beware*, when used with this word for *take heed*, means *to pay attention to yourself*. Pay attention to what comes out of you. So, beware, that is, be watching for incoming information and incoming things into your life from other people. And secondly, pay attention to yourself, what is coming out. I find it interesting the Bible does say that we, even as Christians, we can deceive ourselves. And that is the major thing that is going on right now within the body of Christ. We are deceiving ourselves.

Paul says in I Corinthians 3:18 "Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seems to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he might become wise."

Paul in II Timothy 3:13, he says, "But evil men and seducers shall grow worse and worse in the last days deceiving and being deceived."

Be careful about deceiving oneself. You see in the natural, not talking about being under the influence of the Spirit of God, but just in the natural in the human, I go by my opinions, my convictions, and I also go by what I believe - my beliefs. My opinions, convictions, and beliefs.

All churches are pretty much made up of a group of people who have the same opinions, same convictions, and same beliefs, which are different from everybody else. And once their convictions and beliefs change, they leave and go find another group that meets up with those beliefs and convictions and opinions. The problem that we have is that my standard, in the natural, my standard of discerning and coming to a conclusion of what truth is, is based on what I think, what my opinion is.

I am surprised now, but I am more surprised at myself when I was a younger Christian and I would challenge the older Christians as to whether they knew what they were talking about or not. They had been educated, they had experience in the Word, they had been ministering for years, great servants of God, very dedicated. But see, I knew better, because it did not line up with what I believed, my convictions, or my opinions. After all I have the Holy Spirit. If you have the Holy Spirit your opinions are right, even though they are different than everybody else's opinions. That should wake us up.

"Am I the only one on this planet that has the right opinion? Because my opinion is different than everybody else. Why are you people so wrong?"

Because we are deceiving ourselves. Our opinions, convictions, and beliefs, do not establish truth. Truth establishes itself. That is why, when we are studying the Bible, we need to study the text, not people's beliefs about what the text says. Hundreds, thousands of books, commentaries, and thousands of churches that represent different views, opinions, and beliefs,

and convictions about what God's Word says. How do we come to so many different approaches and views? Because we are not taking the text itself and studying that text itself. So, pay attention to how you are being programmed to think.

People have complained to me over the years about false teaching, "Well, in our church we've got a lot of teaching that's wrong."

"Well, why are you there?"

Every time you tithe and every time you show up to the church are actually supporting it. The false teacher cannot teach unless people come and want it. Most of the time people are saying, "I do not want false teaching," but they look around until they find the false teaching that they agree with. We are being programmed. You are being programmed. Be aware here. Pay attention. Be watchful. What you are receiving is influencing your life. It is either influencing it in the right way or the wrong way. And if you receive it and it is wrong then you become wrong.

Then He says, "**Watch and beware from the leaven of the Pharisees.**" Leaven is a yeasting agent. We have studied this before. Leaven is a yeasting agent put into dough to make the bread rise. Remember they did not take bread, and so Jesus is saying, "Beware and be watchful from the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees." So, naturally, they started reasoning amongst themselves because they said, "We didn't bring bread so what He's telling us is that when the Sadducees and Pharisees offer us bread, don't take it."

Verse 7, **And they were reasoning among themselves, saying that, "We did not take bread."** He said, "Beware of the leaven," we did not take bread. **And when Jesus knew it, He said to them, "O you of little faith."** Literally, *little faith ones*. It is all one word in the Greek text and it is a title, *little faith ones*: people who have very little faith. He is not chiding them to have more faith. They could not have any more faith than they had because they would have had to get it from Jesus. They have no Spirit of God living within them. He is pointing that out to them.

"Why do reason among yourselves because you did not take bread? Do you not perceive, neither remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets you took up? Neither the seven loaves of the four thousand and how many baskets you took up? How do you not perceive that I did not speak to you concerning bread, to beware from the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees?" He is basically saying, "You think I would say to you, 'You guys forgot the food! Now, we are really stuck.'? This is after I just multiplied the food out to feed five thousand people, and multiplied the little boy's lunch out to feed four thousand, and you think we are stuck? Why are you reasoning among yourselves because you did not take bread? I am the bread maker. I am right here. That is obviously not what I meant by leaven, the yeasting agent. So how is it that you do not?" Well, that is a good question because they did not understand because spiritually, they did not have God's Spirit.

Now Jesus causes them to understand. Verse 12, **Then they understood that He did not say to beware from the leaven of bread, but from the doctrine, or teaching, of the**

Pharisees and the Sadducees. You see, leaven when it is used metaphorically, or as an example, or in representation of something, always represents *evil*. Always. In the Bible. So when leaven is used to represent something, it represents evil in its teaching.

Paul used it in I Corinthians 5:4-8. This is where the man was in the church in Corinth and he was having sexual relations with his stepmother. And Paul said to bring it to his attention and tell him he needs to repent. They came back and said, "Well, we've talked to him about it, but he won't repent, and so there's nothing we can do." Paul says, "Yes, there is something you could do, and something you must do." Not a matter of legalism, we have a spiritual influence here, that is going to affect the whole group.

I Corinthians 5:4, In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my Spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ is there to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. In other words, you must discipline this person. It will hurt him in the human but we are interested in his spiritual welfare at the end. **Your glorying is not good** (based on boasting about your church). **Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?** Put a little bit of leaven in dough, it will spread. He is using that now for immorality. A little bit of immorality with spread, a little leaven leavens the whole lump. **Purge out, therefore, that old leaven, that you may be a new lump, as ye are already unleavened. For even Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us. Therefore, let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.**

He is making reference to the feast back in Exodus 12:18-20, The Feast of Unleavened Bread. What is The Feast of Unleavened Bread? Passover is celebrated for one day. That is celebrating the Jews putting the blood of the lamb on their doorpost and the angel of death passing over their house and killing the firstborn of the Egyptians. But the first day after the Passover - Passover is one day - the first day after the Passover and for seven days is called The Feast of Unleavened Bread. *Leaven* represents evil. So, they were to go through their house, their cupboards, even their own person, carrying what they carried. They had to get rid of all the leaven for one week, because leaven represented corruption and influence in their relationship with God.

So, you have a beautiful picture of salvation at Passover, and then fellowship with the Lord right after that in The Feast of Unleavened Bread. Any evil, practice of evil, is going to influence even a saved person. A person will not lose their salvation but that little bit of leaven, that little bit of sin, will spread. We could probably fool a lot of people from the outside but in our own personal lives, if it is sin, it is going to affect our own walk with the Lord and affect our fellowship with other Christians.

And so, in I Corinthians chapter 5 he says, "Purge out that old leaven, because a little bit leaven leavens the whole lump." The whole church is going to be affected by this one man who is in sin and nobody wants to do anything about it. Purge it out. You are already unleavened by receiving Christ, stay unleavened and purge out that old leaven. So Paul, in I Corinthians 5, used leaven as a representation of evil.

He also used it in Galatians 5:9. Galatians chapter 5, the first few verses, Paul talked about Christians who receive Christ by grace but then were told to start keeping the Jewish law. They need to keep the law on the rules and regulation. And grace and law do not mix in the Scriptures. It like oil and water. Paul, all through Galatians, chided them by saying, "If you begun in the Spirit are you know him now made perfect by the performance of the flesh?" Galatians chapter 3, "No, you are not." So he says by being saved by God's grace and receiving God's Spirit in your life and now go try to keep the law, the rules, and regulations? He says, in Galatians 5:9, "A little leaven leavens the whole lump." Your whole walk with the Lord is going to be affected by you trying to keep the law. Whatever spiritual grace produces the peace and the joy will not be there if you try to keep the law.

Also remember back in Matthew chapter 13, the chapter on parables, with a series of parables back in Matthew chapter 13.

Verses 1-9, The Parable of the Sower.

You remember one of the instances when the seeds fell on the ground the birds came and took the seeds and removed it. Jesus explained the birds represent evil.

Verses 24-30, The Wheat and the Tares growing up together. Good and evil growing up together until the judgment day.

Verses 31-32, The Mustard Seed plant that grew so big that the birds came and lodged in its branches, the same birds that are in verses 1-9 that took the seed. The birds represent evil within the kingdom.

Then verse 33 of Matthew 13 was The Parable of the Leaven. Where a woman took three measures of meal and hid leaven in it and the leaven spread so much in the meal that it took up the whole lump.

In all of those instances the birds, the tares, and the leaven, all represent the same thing, evil. Evil in the kingdom of God. It is going to be there until Jesus comes and ends it. But in the meantime, evil will spread. Just like right now we call church and churches we know what that means from a Biblical standpoint. But there is just so much evil. There is so much false teaching.

So basically what he is saying here to us, "Watch and beware of false teaching." That is with the leaven represents. Watch and beware from false teaching, first of all that is coming to you from the outside. The things you read. The people you listen to. Be watchful. Be observant whether it is the truth or not. And then pay attention to yourself that you do not get sidetracked going in the wrong direction by your own opinions, your own judgments, your own convictions, and your own beliefs. Do not take yourself seriously. Only the Word of God is right. So watch out from those who bring you teaching from the outside because our understanding from it is affected on the inside.

So today we have teachings in the body of Christ from the Eastern religions. It is all psychology. Practicing psychological principles. Practicing positive thinking. These are all in the church today. Many years ago, I would say thirty or forty years ago those things were pointed out as being abominable and evil, limited to the Christian Science movement. But now it has spread into the churches and into the body of Christ. The leaven is spreading.

I am responsible for how people influence and affect me. I am responsible for how I take it in and what I become in light of what I am hearing. I can blame it on the false teachers but I am the one that's hearing it, I am the one that is putting my hearing under it. I am the one that is supporting it. And so Jesus was telling them, be watching for the influences on the outside of you and be paying attention to yourself because that same influence that is in that person is also coming from out of you to somebody else, even your own self.

Alright, let's close with prayer.