

## 27. Jesus Explained the Meaning of Leaven

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to understand that Jesus is able to supply their needs as they serve Him, just as He fed the four thousand in Mark. In this topic, we are going to see that the Pharisees again came to test Jesus and try to trap Him. Jesus later used this to explain an important lesson to the disciples.

We have seen that the Pharisees tried to test Jesus many times. In Mark 8:10-13, we see another of those attempts, when Jesus came into the region of Dalmanutha. We see that the Pharisees came to Jesus and began a dispute with Him. The word translated “dispute” means *to question, to examine together or to dispute*. This same word is used in Acts 6:9, where we read, “Then there arose some from what is called the Synagogue of the Freedmen (Cyrenians, Alexandrians, and those from Cilicia and Asia), disputing with Stephen.” In Acts, we see that a group of men tried to challenge the things Stephen was teaching. This was similar to the attitude the Pharisees had as they questioned Jesus. They did not want to learn from Jesus. Instead, they wanted to argue with Him.

They also asked Jesus to prove that He was the Christ by giving them a sign from heaven. “A sign from heaven” meant they wanted Jesus to do some miracle that involved the sun, moon, or stars. Jesus had done many miracles from the time that He had begun His public ministry. Jesus had earlier said, in John 5:36, “But I have a greater witness than John’s; for the works which the Father has given Me to finish—the very works that I do—bear witness of Me, that the Father has sent Me.” Jesus had pointed out that the miracles He had done provided an even greater witness than the Father had sent Him than the witness of John the Baptist. The Pharisees had not believed then. Their demand, for a sign from heaven, showed that they still refused to believe that Jesus came from the Father. We see that these Pharisees were really just trying to test Jesus.

We read that Jesus sighed deeply in His spirit. Then, Jesus asked a question. His question was, “Why does this generation seek a sign?” The word translated “why” in this verse is translated “what”, “who”, “why”, “which” or other similar words a total of five hundred and thirty-eight times in the New Testament. It was really a question to make people think. The next place in this chapter where the word is used is Mark 8:17. That verse says, “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?’” In that verse, Jesus wanted to make the disciples think. In this verse, Jesus wanted to make the Pharisees think about the reason they refused to believe in Him, since He had already done many miracles.

As a result, Jesus told these Pharisees that they would not be given a sign. Jesus had already given the Pharisees plenty of evidence that He is God. Jesus described the Pharisees, in Matthew 15:12-14, when He said, “Then His disciples came and said to Him, ‘Do You know that the Pharisees were offended when they heard this saying?’ But He answered and said, ‘Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted. Let them alone. They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind leads the blind, both will fall into a ditch.’” Jesus said that the Pharisees were blind and that those who followed them were also blind. So, it would have been useless to

do another miracle, because they would not believe. Then, Jesus got into the boat and left that area.

While they were in the boat crossing the sea, Jesus took the opportunity to warn the disciples about the teaching of the Pharisees. Mark 8:14-16 says, “Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, and they did not have more than one loaf with them in the boat. Then He charged them, saying, ‘Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.’ And they reasoned among themselves, saying, ‘*It is* because we have no bread.’” In these verses, we see that Jesus began to teach His disciples, but they misunderstood and thought He was reminding them that they had not brought food with them. There was only one loaf of bread in the entire boat.

As they crossed the sea, Jesus said, “Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.” The disciples immediately began talking among themselves about the fact that they had failed to bring any bread with them. Normally, leaven is used in the dough when bread is baked. Here, we see that the disciples heard the word “leaven” and immediately jumped to the conclusion that Jesus was reminding them that they had forgotten to take any bread. Many people do the same thing today. They hear one or two words and immediately think about something totally unrelated, because they have not learned to be good listeners. Many conflicts would be avoided if people would take the time to listen before they started answering a question that had not been asked or trying to justify themselves when no one was accusing them of anything.

Leaven, or yeast, was usually put into bread to cause the bread to rise, but Jesus also used the word many times to speak of how the influence of hypocrites or false teachers can quickly spread. That is the way Jesus was using the word here. Matthew 16:11-12 says, “‘How is it you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread?—but to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.’ Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” In Matthew, Jesus was talking about the false teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Here, Jesus was talking about the hypocrisy and false teaching of the Pharisees and of Herod.

That hypocrisy is illustrated in Luke 12:1, which says, “In the meantime, when an innumerable multitude of people had gathered together, so that they trampled one another, He began to say to His disciples first *of all*, ‘Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.’” We saw in an earlier topic (on Mark 6:14-29) that Herod was a very immoral man. We also saw that He was willing to kill John the Baptist to try to keep the respect of the leading men of Galilee. As a result, leaven can be used to speak of the influence of a variety of different kinds of sin. That is why 1 Corinthians 5:6-7 says, “Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us.”

Since the disciples did not understand, Jesus explained to them what He meant by leaven. Mark 8:17-21 says, “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? 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?’ 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?’” Jesus explained their misunderstanding, and then, explained why they misunderstood.

First, Jesus explained that He was not rebuking them because they had forgotten to bring bread. Second, He asked them a series of questions and also explained their lack of understanding. The first question was, “Do you not yet perceive nor understand?” Here, Jesus answered this question with another question that pointed out the fact that their hearts were still hardened. Here, we see that they lacked understanding of spiritual truth. That was due to the fact that the Father had not yet given them the Holy Spirit to help them understand spiritual truth. 1 Corinthians 2:13 says, “These things we also speak, not in words which man’s wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual.” The Holy Spirit came on all Christians on the Day of Pentecost after the death, resurrection and return of Jesus to heaven.

Jesus went on to explain more about their lack of spiritual understanding. They had eyes that could see many things in the world around them, but they lacked spiritual eyes that would help them to understand spiritual truth. They had ears that could hear the words Jesus spoke, but they lacked spiritual understanding. 1 Corinthians 2:9-10 says, “But as it is written: ‘Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him.’ But God has revealed *them* to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.” We see that such things can only be revealed to us by the Holy Spirit.

Jesus then went on to point out things the disciples were failing to remember. Jesus reminded the disciples of the time He fed the five thousand with just five loaves. He then asked them how many baskets they had gathered up after He fed the entire crowd of people that day. The disciples quickly remembered that they had gathered up twelve baskets that day. Then, Jesus reminded them about the time He fed the four thousand with seven loaves. He asked how many large baskets they had gathered up that time after everyone was filled with food. They replied that they had gathered up seven large baskets. Jesus pointed out that they could understand physical things but were failing to understand spiritual things. James later wrote, in James 1:5, “If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” In this verse, we see that we need to pray for spiritual wisdom and understanding, because it is the Lord who gives us those things.

In the same way, we want to help our physical and spiritual children understand the importance of seeking spiritual wisdom and understanding from the Lord, so they will be able to help others effectively. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to depend on the Lord for wisdom and understanding.