



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

Beware (Mark 8:1-26)

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Paul Meinsen / PO Box 891, Jefferson City, MO 65102 / paul.meinsen@capitolcom.org

For the interim session, we plan to meet most Wednesdays during the 12noon-1pm lunch hour in House Hearing Room #6. I hope you are able to make many of our studies. We will continue our study in the Gospel of Mark.

INTRODUCTION

Warning: This product has been found to cause cancer in laboratory mice.
Found: on box of rat poison.

Caution: Remove infant before folding stroller.

Warning: Do not put in mouth.
Found: On package of bottle rockets

Warning: May contain small parts.
Found: On a Frisbee

Caution: Contents of this bottle should not be fed to fish.
Found: On bottle of dog shampoo

Caution: "If you do not understand or cannot read all directions, cautions and warnings, do not use this product."
Found: On bottle of drain cleaner (does it really matter where it was found)

Today, we have three sections in this long passage, each of which could support its own sermon, but one key verse stands out—Mark 8:15 *And He was giving orders to them, saying, "Watch out! Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod."*

Jesus' warning is not wacky. It may sound odd—no doubt—but what we will see today is that it is a real danger to the life of the believer, then and now. So we must pay heed.

Leading up to this key verse, Mark tells the story of Jesus' second feeding of a multitude of people.

Mark 8:1-10 In those days, when there was again a large crowd and they had nothing to eat, Jesus called His disciples and said to them, "I feel compassion for the people because they have remained with Me now three days and have nothing to eat. If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way; and some of them have come from a great distance." And His disciples answered Him, "Where will anyone be able to find enough bread here in this desolate place to satisfy these people?" And He was asking them,

"How many loaves do you have?" And they said, "Seven." And He directed the people to sit down on the ground; and taking the seven loaves, He gave thanks and broke them, and started giving them to His disciples to serve to them, and they served them to the people. They also had a few small fish; and after He had blessed them, He ordered these to be served as well. And they ate and were satisfied; and they picked up seven large baskets full of what was left over of the broken pieces. About four thousand were there; and He sent them away. And immediately He entered the boat with His disciples and came to the district of Dalmanutha.

Just like many of Jesus' miracles, the compelling force was His great compassion for those who had gathered around Him (v2). Also observed is the failure of the disciples in forgetting what took place only months earlier when Jesus fed over 5000. And as usual, Jesus' miracle was immediate, complete and irrefutable. With the imagery of bread in mind, Mark moved on to Jesus' confrontation which brings about the warning we want to address in this study.

Mark 8:11-21 The Pharisees came out and began to argue with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, to test Him. Sighing deeply in His spirit, He said, "Why does this generation seek for a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation." Leaving them, He again embarked and went away to the other side. And they had forgotten to take bread, and did not have more than one loaf in the boat with them. And He was giving orders to them, saying, "Watch out! Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." They began to discuss with one another the fact that they had no bread. And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why do you discuss the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet see or understand? Do you have a hardened heart? "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 broken pieces you picked up?" They said to Him, "Twelve." "When I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of broken pieces did you pick up?" And they said to Him,

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TRUMAN BUILDING: THURSDAYS @ 7AM, 4THFLOOR CAFETERIA

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"Seven." And He was saying to them, "Do you not yet understand?"

A REQUEST PROMPTS A REBUKE (8:11-12)

Looking back at what Mark has recorded concerning the life of Jesus, this request borders on the insidious. It would have been legitimate to ask Jesus to give a sign of authentication, if no sign had been given. But that simply was not the case.

Pharisees and other Jewish religious leaders had already seen miraculous "signs from heaven". In the record of Mark alone, the leaders had witnessed Jesus heal a crippled man (2:1-13), heal a man with a withered hand (3:1-12), cast out demons (3:22) and even raise the dead (5:1-20). All of which were foretold by the prophets concerning the coming Messiah (Isaiah 35:5-6).

The problem with these religious leaders was not that there was no "sign from heaven"; plenty had been given. Their problem was that they, because of their hardened hearts, refused to see the signs and understand. It was not an issue of a "lack of evidence;" it was a conscious decision to ignore and not accept the evidence.

The author makes the motive clear in verse 11; they were "seeking from Him a sign from heaven, to test Him." In other words, they wanted a sign that they could judge as "being from heaven". In their minds, the previous incredible miracles which were obvious "signs from heaven" were not credible. Therefore, they wanted more.

The scene itself would have been unbelievable. Imagine, Jesus, at that moment, opening the eyes of a blind man (whom everyone knew was born blind) and then the Pharisees huddling up, and like judges on American Idol, determining if it was a "sign from heaven." Or possibly, Jesus calling down fire from heaven and burning up all the Romans would have pleased their judgments.

SHE KEPT ASKING UNTIL SHE RECEIVED, SEEKING UNTIL SHE FOUND, AND KNOCKING UNTIL IT WAS OPENED TO HER.
--JOHN MACARTHUR

The truth is that no matter what "sign" Jesus would have performed, these leaders would not have believed. Their pattern of reaction throughout the first two years of Jesus' ministry shows what they would have done if Jesus would have granted their request when they asked.

Therefore, Jesus replied that no more signs will be given. He will still do miracles, though, for He has much compassion on the people. Matthew records that the only "sign" for this generation would be the "sign of Jonah" in which Jesus prophesied concerning His own death & resurrection (Matthew 16:4; 12:39-40).

One purpose of the miracles was to show the people of Israel that Jesus was their promised Messiah. But to ignore these signs for ones they "approved" was audacious, prideful and foolish.

And this same sentiment is still prevalent today. People still want more "proof" in the face of all the proof they actually need. Comments like "Prove to me...that there is a God" or "show me that Jesus truly existed or rose from the dead" or "prove that the Bible is true" are just a few examples. The evidence is there, if it will be believed.

AN INFLUENCE PROMPTS A WARNING (8:12-15)

Jesus and the disciples leave via a boat back across the Sea of Galilee. Along the route, Jesus gives out a critical warning: "Watch out. Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod" (8:15).

Leaven is yeast; the element found in bread which makes it rise. Only a small amount is added; but over time, it builds up to make the dough expand. It is used throughout Scripture as an illustration of how something (typically evil or sin); something small can grow to have great influence in one's life.

The leaven of the Pharisees can be seen in their hypocrisy; which Jesus just addressed in Mark 7:6-9 (cf. Matthew 23). They rejected God's law to follow the traditions and laws of men. In the confrontation that just took place, these leaders wanted to see a sign, not so they can believe and praise, but for a test or a trap.

The Apostle Paul, once a Pharisee, had to address this very issue with the church in Galatians which was being "leavened" by the traditionalists who wanted to go back to keeping laws, rituals and rules (Galatians 3:1ff).

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The leaven of Herod could have been seen throughout his family tree. This warning addressed secularism and immorality. Herod's family was filled with pride, adultery, deception, greed and murder. A family, in other words, totally devoid of God and absolutely focused on personal ambition and gain.

Herod, like the Pharisees, sought a sign from Jesus during Jesus' trial (Luke 23:8-9). And just like the Pharisees, Herod received nothing from Jesus.

These same elements of leaven are still alive and active today. Therefore, Jesus' warning to His followers then is just as necessary to His followers today. Hypocrisy is abundant as people attempt to live a façade in the face of others to impress them with something that they are not.

Legalism can be observed as people attempt, either through "Christian" living, other religions or just their own good deeds, to make themselves right before God. Too many times, under the cloak of "holiness", unbiblical rules are placed on people—in other words, "if you are right with God then you will... and you will not..." It is true that followers of Christ are to imitate Him and be holy, but we are to allow God to dictate what that looks like and not burden ourselves and others with our own ideas and rules.

These warnings are also for some are like a past presidential candidate who said "I believe in God. I pray and ask him for help. I pray like a lawyer. I try to make a deal — get me out of this jam, and I'll start going back to church."¹

Immorality, so rampant in our (and every) society, still plays havoc on a person's heart—even for a person who has been saved and transformed. Therefore, a believer's watchfulness is continual. One needs to stay in the Scriptures; stay in fellowship with God through prayer, reading and meditation; stay in fellowship with God's people to encourage one other in love and in service.

A MISUNDERSTANDING PROMPTS A REPRIMAND (8:16-21)

The disciples, though, totally miss Jesus' metaphor. Their minds were on food and not on the discussion with the Pharisees that just took place. In reality, their response amongst themselves did not even make sense in light of what Jesus said.

And so Jesus reprimanded them for not understanding. In fact, it is a strong reprimand. He used the same phrases from the prophet Jeremiah (Jeremiah 5:12) that He used in rebuking the Pharisees for their lack of perception in Mark 4:12. He then reminded them of His past miraculous actions of feeding 5000 in one instant and the recent feeding of 4000.

In other words, Jesus is saying "Why are you thinking and concern about food? I am here. If I can feed all those people with very little to work with, what do you think I do for you few who are here?" These men had been exposed to so much of Jesus' teachings and actions, but they allowed themselves to get bogged down with the physical and trivial. Thus, they miss what He wants to truly see and know. (It is good to note, though, that Matthew 16:12 says that then, they understood what Jesus was talking about: "the teaching of the Pharisees".)

Does this same trait still run in believers today? Unfortunately, "yes" is the answer. It is still easy to see all that is seen about Jesus, read about the great promises of God and even observe Him at work in one's life to forget and to consume oneself with anxiousness and worry over the everyday needs of one's life.

So how can one keep from misunderstanding and be filled with worry? Here are a couple of helps:

Psalm 1:1-3 How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, Nor stand in the path of sinners, Nor sit in the seat of scoffers! But his delight is in the law of the LORD, And in His law he meditates day and night. He will be like a tree firmly planted by streams of water, Which yields its fruit in its season And its leaf does not wither; And in whatever he does, he prospers.

A consistent reading and meditation upon the Scriptures will help one in his or her understanding of God and His ways; as well as, provide motivation to grow in His grace and knowledge.

1 Corinthians 15:32-34 If from human motives I fought with wild beasts at Ephesus, what does it profit me? If the dead are not raised, LET US EAT AND DRINK, FOR TOMORROW WE DIE. Do not be deceived: "Bad company corrupts good morals." Become sober-minded as you ought, and stop

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sinning; for some have no knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.

Paul is similar to Jesus in his warnings. The whole of chapter 15 of the letter of 1 Corinthians is about the false teachers who say there is no resurrection. Therefore, he said do not be influenced by those false teachers because their teaching leads to a false/wrong way of living. Instead, surround yourself with the right kind of company and to start thinking rightly (“Be sober-minded”) and know God. His rebuke is also quite strong as he wrote, “I speak this to your shame.” They should, just like the disciples with Jesus, have known better.

CONCLUSION

Jesus’ warning was quite clear—even though it took some extra explaining to make it clear to the disciples—continuously be watchful for those influences that oppose the gospel. Traditionalism, legalism, immorality—all of these can, if not recognized and rooted out can have a harmful effect on the life of a believer and on the church.

But before we conclude...

Mark 8:22-26 And they came to Bethsaida. And they brought a blind man to Jesus and implored Him to touch him. Taking the blind man by the hand, He brought him out of the village; and after spitting on his eyes and laying His hands on him, He asked him, "Do you see anything?" And he looked up and said, "I see men, for I see them like trees, walking around." Then again He laid His hands on his eyes; and he looked intently and was restored, and began to see everything clearly. And He sent him to his home, saying, "Do not even enter the village."

...let us note two more things about Jesus from this miracle. First of all, Jesus, as we have seen, can heal in any manner He desires. He never set a pattern for others to copy and there are no “magic words or formula.” He did not simply miss on his first try with this blind man. But rather, as John Calvin said, it is Jesus’ sovereign prerogative to heal this man in this manner.

Secondly, Jesus will perform a miracle or a “sign” for those who are in desperate need. For those seeking to test or tempt, nothing was given. But

for those who came to Him out of desperation, He showed much mercy and compassion.

If you are sitting there expecting God to show you some grand miracle or impressive proof of His existence or love, you are wasting your time and you are testing the patience of God. He proves His existence every day and every night as His creation extols His greatness (Psalm 19:1-6; Romans 1:18). He has also shown you His great love (as well as His great wrath) in the crucifixion of His own Son; and He has provided great proof by raising Him from the dead (verified by numerous eyewitnesses). The question is: will you accept as truth (it is truth whether you accept it or not) what He has already given? Believe the evidence. Believe His Word and repent of your sins. Only through this faith will you find forgiveness, hope, and a life eternal.

God can forgive your sins, are you interested?

¹ www.usatoday.com/news/topstories/2007-08-10-101247306_x.htm as of June 19, 2012.