

RENEWED IN THE SPIRIT OF YOUR MIND - Knowing How the Life of God Gets Inside - Part two - Teaching #2150

Sunday, December 5th, 2021, 6:30 p.m.

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BE VERY CAREFUL YOU DON'T STOP THINKING LIKE A CHRISTIAN WHILE YOU GO TO CHURCH AND READ YOUR BIBLE

Mark 8:14-21 - "Now they had forgotten to bring bread, and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. [15] And he cautioned them, saying, "Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." [16] And they began discussing with one another the fact that they had no bread. [17] And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts 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 broken pieces did you take up?" They said to him, "Twelve." [20] "And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?" And they said to him, "Seven." [21] And he said to them, "Do you not yet understand?"

This appears to be a strange passage on first reading. The disciples get on the boat and someone brings it to their attention that they're about to launch into a fairly tedious journey without any bread for lunch. So they're already worried about this when they hear Jesus saying something about "*leaven*" in **verse 16**.

Because they're already focused on the forgotten bread, they assume, mistakenly, that this was what Jesus was referring to. It seems such a simple, conversational mis-cue. A simple, "No, that's not what I'm talking about," would seem sufficient.

But Jesus seems genuinely burdened by their comment. You can almost hear the passion in His voice as He launches into a sermon diatribe against what He sees as their *blind eyes*, *deaf ears*, *hard hearts*, and *dense minds*. And yes, He specifically mentions all of those things I just listed.

So what's really going on here?

- 1) **WHEN POSSIBLE, LOOK CAREFULLY AT PARALLEL PASSAGES FOR ADDITIONAL DETAILS THAT GIVE A CONTEXT TO PASSAGES THAT SEEM DIFFICULT ON THEIR OWN**

Matthew sheds additional facts that explain Jesus' reaction to the disciples in the boat - **Matthew 16:1-4** - **"And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. [2] He answered 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 stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. [4] An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah." So he left them and departed."**

These two accounts need to be put together. Mark tells us Jesus was visibly concerned with the disciples' fuss over bread because it was distracting them from Jesus' primary concern. His concern was about their **thinking** - the way they would use their **minds** as His disciples.

Let's put the whole account together. Very shortly after feeding 4000 people with seven loaves of bread and a "few fish" (Matthew) the religious leaders come up to Jesus with the request that He please confirm His Messianic identity by performing some sign - some miracle that would afford them proof so they could place their faith in Him.

Mark's account is, as is typically the case with Mark, very brief - **Mark 8:11-12** - "The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven *to test him*. [12] And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, "Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation."

So these religious leaders aren't sincere in their request. They are "**testing**" Jesus. They want to **appear** as though they are sincere seekers of truth, lacking only reasonable evidence. But they have no **authentic desire** to acknowledge Jesus. They are not interested in following Jesus even if they could see clearly who He was.

But there's a problem. They don't want to appear opposed to the One everyone else seems to admire so much. They're using their minds to ***craft a non-response*** to the truth they know. They're cleverly dodging Jesus without ***looking*** like they don't want to honor Him.

So, no, Jesus says. There will be no signs given. Jesus isn't going to play. And that's about all ***Mark*** gives us prior to Jesus lengthy caution directed to His disciples in the boat.

Now we add ***Matthew's*** account into the mix - **Matthew 16:1-4** -
“**And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. [2] He answered 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 stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. [4] An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.' So he left them and departed.**”

We're going to look specifically into the ***mind*** - the ***thinking*** - of the Pharisees in just a minute because it requires a whole point unto itself. But just reading these words helps us see what launches Jesus into such a lengthy, passionate lecture to the disciples on the boat.

His reproof has nothing whatsoever to do with their forgetting bread. Look again at **Mark 8:17-18** - **“Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? [18] Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember?”**

It's important to notice that Jesus is the first one to speak on the boat. As far as we know from text, the first words spoken on the boat weren't uttered by the disciples. Mark tells us they were worried about forgetting bread in **verse 14**. But we're not told they **spoke** about this out loud. The first spoken words are from Jesus - **“Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.”**

Jesus saw something in His confrontation with the Pharisees that He couldn't get off His loving mind. He's still thinking of how these religious thinkers responded to Him. There was no shortage of proof of who Jesus was. Miracles and teaching abounded. But something happened in His dialogue with them that concerned Him deeply.

And the fact that He cautioned His disciples about it means Jesus knew this same kind of thinking - this same calculated misuse of the **mind** - would be tempting to His disciples as well. Both Matthew and Mark record Jesus sounding the alarm in slightly different words:

Matthew 16:6 - “Jesus said to them, ‘Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.’”

Mark 8:15 - “And he cautioned them, saying, ‘Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.’”

So what are the disciples to watch out *for*? What did Jesus see in His encounter with the Pharisees that caused Him such concern? And how does it relate to the theme of this teaching series on the Christian use of the *mind*? For all of these questions we need to look carefully at Matthew’s expanded account of this conversation:

- 2) **JESUS HAD JUST WITNESSED HOW PAINFULLY EASY IT WAS FOR RELIGIOUS PEOPLE TO USE THEIR MINDS AGAINST SPIRITUAL GROWTH RATHER THAN FOR IT**

Let your mind linger over this dreadful process in Matthew’s account:

Matthew 16:1-4 - “And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. [2] He answered 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 stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. [4] An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.” So he left them and departed.”

There’s such an abrupt **ending** to this conversation. And **Jesus** is the one who ends it - “**So he left them and departed**”(4). Jesus saw something that so frustrated Him, He says, in effect, “This conversation is over. I’m done talking to you. I can’t deal with people like you.”

They don’t get the “**sign**” for which they ask. But rather than just ignore their request, Jesus exposes them in a deeper fashion than they expected. In other words, Jesus doesn’t just say “**no**” to their request. Rather, instead of just **denying** their request for a sign, He exposes the dark **reason** lying behind their question. They aren’t being **honest**. And Jesus always requires honesty. They are pretending all they lack is **evidence** in order to follow Jesus. They want to **appear** as open to Jesus as anyone.

Jesus, on the other hand, wants to reveal the ***wicked way these religious experts are thinking - the wicked way they are using their minds to calculate against spiritual transformation.***

Look at what Jesus says - **Matthew 16:1-3** - “He answered 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 stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.’ You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.”

Jesus is talking about the way these religious leaders ***think***. He points out the way they make ***deductions*** in ordinary life. They look up at the sky at night and it’s red. “O,” they say, “It’s going to be a great day for planting or harvesting or fishing tomorrow!” Or, they look up at the same sky in the morning and say, “Look, the sky is red. That means it’s going to be a stormy day. Not a good day for being at sea.”

They make careful, intelligent plans that work. They can organize their real lives around these logical thoughts. Their minds serve them just fine as they make a living and protect their bodies. They’re able to ***do what they should do because they are able to use their minds to the correct ends.***

I know this is obvious, but it's crucial to understanding Jesus' passionate concern and words of caution to His followers. Jesus is saying that there is nothing wrong with the Pharisees' minds. Their minds work just fine. They can think with perfect clarity. They can see and process and use logic and deduce accurately. But while they do this all the time in the world in which they live, they don't see the Son of God standing right in front of them!

These same people who observe and plan out responses - **intelligent - appropriate - healthy** - responses - all the time, make such terrible, **self-destructive** decisions regarding the divine truth of Jesus Christ and following Him. Please see this. **Materially** they **help** themselves with their minds. **Spiritually** they **destroy** themselves with those same minds.

Now, back in the boat with the disciples. The Pharisees aren't around anymore. Jesus is just with His disciples. Because He's alone with them, He can spill His heart out in an unguarded gush of emotion.

Remember, He's talking now with His closest followers on planet earth. Probably with tears in His eyes and a raised voice He pleads with them - "Never, never, never let happen in your minds what has happened to the Pharisees! Don't start down that road even in a tiny, momentary lapse of judgment. This kind of thinking process is so

infectious and so deadly to my life and teaching flourishing in you!”

There’s one more question we need to deal with if we’re going to wrap this up properly. If these religious leaders were using their minds so ineptly for spiritual purposes, ***what caused this dishonesty and blindness?*** How did they end up like this? And how can you and I ***avoid*** ending up like this?

3) **THE REASON THESE LEADERS USED THEIR MINDS TO CALCULATE AGAINST JESUS WAS THEIR PREVIOUS ADULTEROUS COMMITMENTS**

Jesus is painfully specific about this: **Matthew 16:4** - “**“An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.” So he left them and departed.**”

This is a very direct and descriptive charge. These Pharisees were “***evil***” to be sure, but it was a very specific ***kind*** of evil. They were, to use Jesus’ words, “***adulterous.***” And that single word - “***adulterous***” - tells us ***why*** they used their brilliant minds so poorly when it came to dealing with spiritual light and truth.

They could use their mind sharply and properly when it came to looking after their own earth-bound interests. They could calculate the weather when their fishing and farming and income was affected by it. But they couldn't use their minds that effectively when it came to the rule of Jesus Christ because they loved ***their own agendas*** more than they loved ***Him***.

They were ruled by other pursuits. And those other pursuits were called ***"adulterous"*** by Jesus because they had taken the place of what should have been their ***primary allegiance***. Other commitments drew their minds into justifying their adultery to their spouse, Jesus Christ.

For all of their religious routines, they had self-ruled hearts. And that meant they used their minds in favor of their own inward mistress rather than their spouse. That's what ***"adulterous"*** means. Their minds weren't ***stupid***. They were ***unfaithfully engaged in the service of other lusts***.

They couldn't use their minds to reach Jesus for the same reason an adulterer can't find a committed relationship with his wife. Or, to say the same thing a bit differently, they couldn't get to Jesus with their minds for the same reason a bank robber can't reach the police. Rebellion effects the way you allow your mind to be confronted by the

authority of Jesus Christ.

But there's more in our text. You have to face the fact that Jesus obviously knew His own disciples were vulnerable to this kind of mental unfaithfulness. The Pharisees aren't even in hearing distance when Jesus initiated raising this issue on the boat - **Matthew 16:6** - **"Jesus said to them, 'Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.'"**

"This can happen to you!", Jesus is saying. "It gets into the fabric of brilliant, disciplined, spiritual intentions the way **yeast** gets into dough. Adulterous thinking is infectious and habit forming."

Of course it is. How else can we explain what happens over and over. A person is brilliant enough to sell insurance, buy real-estate, calculate income tax, build furniture, but tell him he's not been faithful in getting out to church very much lately, and he just can't figure out how to fix that. Or, going back a few years, a American president can draw up and sign peace treaties between nations, draw \$100,000 per speaking engagement, but can't remember what the word "**is**" means. This kind of mental adultery is very close to all of us.

4) **THIS IS HOW SPIRITUAL FAILURE BECOMES SPIRITUAL BONDAGE**

God has grace greater than all our sins. But there is something more deadly than the sins we fall into. Spiritual bondage begins the moment I use my mental agility to become **crafty** against the simple light of revelation and the holy call of the Spirit to repentance. Sin produces **guilt**. Craftiness and mental spin produce **bondage**.

Just compare **sin** and **mental craftiness** in the gospel accounts. You'll find Jesus never avoided **sinners**. He was actually dubbed a "**friend of sinners**." And we should constantly praise God for that, because it means we're included in His care and grace. Prostitutes, thieves, crooked tax collectors, liars - Jesus had time and grace for the whole sorted bunch.

But notice how He shunned those who used their wits to **justify** their sins. Our text is just one classic example. He always parts company with **spin**. I say it again - **never use the powers of your mind to calculate against a humble, honest repentant walk of growth in the presence of Jesus**. It is safer by far to be impaired with a **weak** mind, than armed with a sharp, cagey **resisting** one.

We never move past having to be on the look-out for the leaven of a crafty mind. We have to constantly hunt down self-justifying spin. Jesus won't talk to people who play those games. That's not what the Creator gave you a mind **for**. Use it to discover His glory and joy and

never to harden your heart in slick rebellion.