

Introduction

1. Have you ever forgotten to pack something for a trip? Was it your fault or did you blame someone else?
 - a. Today, I left the house in a rush. As I got down the hill to the main road, I realized I didn't have my watch or my wallet.
 - b. I was close enough home that a quick U-turn and a few extra minutes resolved my issue.
2. Jesus and His disciples had just made a quick exit after the Pharisees confronted Jesus and demanded that He give them a sign from heaven affirming His authority.
 - a. Jesus had just performed another miracle of multiplying seven loaves of bread and a few small fish into enough to feed over 4000 people.
 - b. The disciples had gathered up seven large baskets of leftovers.
 - c. However, during their hasty exit, they had brought on one loaf of bread with them in the boat.
 - d. Now, they were in an argument about whose fault it was and what they were going to do about it.
 - e. Jesus used their argument about bread a teachable moment to warn His disciples about the unbelief of the Pharisees and its danger to even to them.
3. **Read Mk 8:14-21.**

A. A Warning (14-15)

1. Jesus and the disciples had departed quickly after Jesus' confrontational encounter with the Pharisees at the end of last week's study passage (cf., Mk 8:13).
 - a. They didn't have time or presence of mind to gather adequate provisions for their trip.
 - b. The disciples discovered that they had only one loaf of bread with them and were apparently engaged in an argument about who had forgotten to bring the bread and what they would do now.
 - c. Warren Wiersbe notes, "It must have grieved Jesus that His hand-picked helpers were so spiritually obtuse. The fact that He had multiplied bread on two occasions and fed over ten thousand people had apparently made little impression on them! Why worry and argue over one loaf of bread when you have Jesus in the boat with you? Their minds were dull, their hearts were hard (see Mark 6:52), their eyes were blind, and their ears were deaf (see Mark 4:11-12)" (Warren Wiersbe, *Be Diligent*, 96).
2. Jesus gave His disciples a warning, ". . . Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod" (15).
 - a. Yeast (Gk., *zumos* – "yeast, leaven") has been associated with evil and sin since OT times.
 - b. The Jewish Feasts of Unleavened Bread and Passover begin with a ceremonial search for leaven (Hb., *bedikat hametz*) and cleaning of the house.
 - 1) The preparation for and celebration of Passover are described in Ex 12:17-20: "You shall also observe the Feast of Unleavened Bread, for on this very day I brought your hosts out of the land of Egypt; therefore you shall observe this day throughout your generations as a permanent ordinance. In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening, you shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month at evening. Seven days there shall be no leaven found in your houses; for whoever eats what is leavened, that person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is an alien or a native of the land. You shall not eat anything leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread."
 - 2) The bread of Passover is unleavened bread, which is made without yeast.
 - 3) It was made in haste (Ex 12:8-11) since there was no time for yeast bread to rise before baking.
 - 4) It is also omitted from Passover and even from offering made to the Lord (cf., Lev 2:11, 6:17) because of its association with sin and the fact that offerings to the Lord must be holy.
 - c. Wiersbe elucidates, "Evil, like leaven, is small and hidden, but it spreads and soon infects the whole (Gal. 5:9). The Bible uses leaven as a picture of false doctrine (Gal. 5:1-9), unjudged sin in the church (1 Cor. 5), and hypocrisy (Luke 12:1). In this context, Jesus warned them about the teaching (false doctrine) of the Pharisees and the followers of Herod. The Pharisees 'said but they did not'; in other words, they practiced and encouraged hypocrisy (note Mark 7:6). . . . If this false teaching got into the hearts and minds of the disciples, it would infect them and pollute the truth Jesus had given them to proclaim about Himself and His kingdom" (Wiersbe, 96-97).

- d. James Brooks adds a slightly different perspective on the meaning that Jesus ascribed to yeast when he writes, “The parallel in Matt 16:12 identifies the yeast of the Pharisees as their teaching, whereas Luke 12:1, which reflects a different setting, identifies it as their hypocrisy. In Mark the yeast likely reflects their unbelief and demand for a sign. As for the yeast of Herod, it could be adultery, murder, and political ambition. One would expect the yeast of the Pharisees and the yeast of Herod to have been the same thing. Therefore the yeast of Herod probably was also unbelief connected with miracles” (Brooks, 129).
- e. Whether the yeast of the Pharisees was hypocrisy, unbelief, sin or all three—it was certainly something that drew a warning from Jesus to His disciples that they not fall into these ways themselves.

B. Questions and the Meaning of the Warning (16-21)

1. The disciples didn’t understand Jesus’ warning. They thought He was talking about physical bread.
 - a. Perhaps they feared that He was hungry and upset with them for not bringing enough bread.
 - b. Why in the world hadn’t they brought some of the leftovers from feeding the 4000?
2. Certainly, Jesus was frustrated that once again His own disciples didn’t understand Him.
 - a. The disciples took Jesus’ words literally when Jesus was speaking about spiritual things in context about their most recent encounter with the unbelieving Pharisees.
 - b. The disciples were not spiritually tuned in just as they hadn’t been concerning Jesus’ teaching in parables (Mk 4:13) and His teaching about what defiles a person (Mk 7:17ff).
3. Jesus quizzed the disciples with a series of nine questions:
 - a. “Why are you talking about having no bread?” (17) – Isn’t that what you’re talking about?
 - b. “Do you still not see or understand?” (17) - No
 - c. “Are your hearts hardened (Gk., *peporomenen* – “petrified; rendered stupid/callous”)?” (17) - Perhaps
 - d. “Do you have eyes but fail to see . . . ?” (18) - Apparently
 - e. “. . . Do you have ears and not hear?” (18) - Apparently
 - f. “And don’t you remember?” (18) – Apparently not
 - g. “When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?
 - 1) “‘Twelve,’ they replied.” (19)
 - 2) They got the physical fact right, but did they understand the spiritual meaning, especially of twelve baskets.
 - 3) Jesus came first to redeem Israel, all twelve tribes.
 - h. “And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?
 - 1) “They answered, ‘Seven.’” (20)
 - 2) Ditto. Again, they got the fact right, but did they see the spiritual meaning as Jesus miraculously fed Gentiles this time.
 - 3) The number seven is the number of completeness. Jesus came first for Israel but ultimately for all of mankind.
 - i. “Do you still not understand?” (21) – Apparently not.
4. Daniel Akin observes, “These questions are not intended to shame but to instruct. For sure, they are slow learners, but then, so are we. How hesitant we are to embrace the truth of Luke 1:37 (“For nothing will be impossible with God.”) . . . and of Philippians 4:19 (“And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.). Like the 12 apostles, we often see our Lord’s great works in our lives but still fail to fully understand and trust Him” (Daniel Akin, *Exalting Jesus in Mark*, 169).

5. They understood the literal but missed the symbolic meaning.
 - a. Jesus asked, “Do you still not understand?”
 - b. The miracles of Jesus revealed Him to be the Son of God sent to bring the Kingdom of God to earth.
 - c. This was Jesus’ purpose from the beginning.
 - d. When would the disciples see Jesus for who He was? When would they hear His words as the word of God to them about the Kingdom of God to which He called them?
 - e. James Brooks notes, “. . . the account contributes further to Mark’s theme of the dullness of the disciples. In fact, it constitutes the climax of that theme because in the following division the disciples began to perceive who Jesus is” (James Brooks, *Mark*, 128).
 - f. William Lane concludes, “Jesus is the one true loaf that is with the disciples in the boat. The repeated question concerning understanding (verses 18, 21) indicates that the didactic goal of Jesus’ ministry to the disciples has not been attained and points forward to the miracle of understanding which leads to the confession of Ch. 8:27-30 (William Lane, *The Gospel of Mark*, 283).
 - g. The spiritually blind eyes of the disciples would soon begin to open (cf. Mk 8:27-30), but first Jesus would heal another physically blind man (cf., Mk 8:22-26), which is our passage for next week.

C. Reflections

1. What yeast of sin or hypocrisy contaminates your life in the Lord and needs to be removed?
 - a. It is critical to remove the smallest sinful thought or action before it spreads and takes over your life.
 - b. Don’t be a hypocrite who says one thing and does another.
2. Do you have ears to hear and eyes to see and yet remain deaf and blind to the truth Jesus would have you hear and see.
 - a. Open your spiritual ears to hear what the Spirit of God speaks to you.
 - b. Look at the world with the eyes of Jesus.
 - c. Hear and see the needs not only in your life but also in the lives of others.
3. Jesus may be frustrated with your failure to hear and see the truth, but He continues to teach and to lead you to find Kingdom truth.
4. Oh, that our spiritual eyes and ears may be open to the truth Jesus speaks and shows to us today. Oh, that we would be ready to respond to others with the love and compassion of Jesus!