

LEAVENED BREAD

Mark 8:10-21

Intro: It is very apparent to anyone who reads through the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, that the Lord had very little to encourage Him during His life here on earth. It seems, on the one hand, that wherever He went, the scribes and Pharisees were there. And they followed the Lord, not because they wanted to learn from Him. They believed that He needed to learn from them. They were blinded to all of the love and goodness and compassion which He manifested in His work with people. They listened to Him teach, but it was only with the attitude of wanting to hear Him say something that they might be able to use against Him. They were very subtle in what they did because they did not want the people to know how they really felt about Him. They were afraid of the people. Here and there we might read of a Pharisee like Nicodemus who was impressed by the things that the Lord was doing that he, at least, had to admit to Himself that Jesus had come from God and that no man could do what the Lord did if it were not for the fact that God was “with Him.” But Nicodemus was an exception, not the rule.

On the other hand the Lord had the disciples whom He had chosen to be with Him in the work of God. He had not chosen prominent men, but men who common people, men whose names we would never have heard if the Lord had not called them to Himself. But our Lord got very little pleasure out of these men. One wasn't even saved, and he eventually turned traitor to the Lord, helping the Jews to arrest the Lord. This ultimately led to the Lord's crucifixion. Both Matthew (26:56) and Mark (14:50) tell us that in the Lord's darkest hour “they all forsook Him, and fled.” We have seen already in our study of Mark's Gospel how slowly the disciples were in understanding what the Lord was saying when He taught. They did not understand what the Lord's mission in the world was, and often argued with Him about what He taught. But none of us can point an accusing finger at the disciples because our record with the Lord is not clear either. We, too, are slow learners. We often are disobedient in things that we say and do, and we find that the Lord is seeking to teach us things that we should have learned a long time ago.

So, whether we look at the Lord's disciples, or at the scribes and Pharisees and the other religious leaders of the Jews, there was not very much that would give pleasure to the Lord. We come to such a passage in the verses we will consider together today. In fact, if I were choosing to

Speak from different passages in different books of the Bible, I doubt if I would ever have chosen the text that is before us today. That is one great value of preaching through a book of the Bible: you are required to deal with all of the verses in a book as you come to them. And that is good.

As our text begins in Mark 8:10 we are told that the Lord got into a boat with His disciples, and that they traveled down the western side of the Sea of Galilee until they came to a town called Dalmanutha. In fact, this is the only place that this town is mentioned in the Bible.

I. THE LORD JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES IN DALMANUTHA (Mark 8:10-13).

The Lord had taken His disciples there as a part of their ministry. How long He expected to be there, we do not know. Nothing is said about any healing that was done there, nor about any teaching that our Lord did. *But there was a group of Pharisees there.* And Mark simply tells us that “the Pharisees came forth.” They began to question Him, not, as I have said before, because they were interested in learning from Him, but because they wanted to catch Him in something that He might say that would give them a case against the Lord.

But they did ask for a sign. They wanted evidence “from heaven” that would show that He was the Person that He claimed to be, a proof that He was different from anyone else. It was actually a ridiculous request because daily the Lord wherever He went was giving “signs” of His Deity, that He was the Son of God, evidence that was sufficient that would convince anybody who sincerely wanted to know the truth about our Lord, which in turn would cause them to put their trust in Him. The Lord had been healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, cleansing lepers, enabling the lame to walk. He had been teaching with an authority and power that none of those scribes and Pharisees had ever heard from their teachers, and which none of them were capable of in their teaching. When they said “from heaven,” maybe they were looking for some evidence like God had done, speaking from heaven, when the Lord Jesus was baptized. However, you could perform miracles all day long before these men, but they were so blinded spiritually that they would never have been able to understand the meaning of those miracles if the Lord had not given them eyes to see. Their request was not a sincere request. They were tempting the Lord, *and the Lord knew it!*

To show how disgusted the Lord was Mark tells us in verse 12 that the Lord “sighed deeply in his spirit.” He was both grieved and disturbed. Those Pharisees were confronted with eternal issues of eternal life and eternal death, and they were wasting the Lord’s time asking for another sign when the Lord overwhelmed people with signs wherever He went, and in all of His teaching. The Lord was not going to argue with them, or try beyond what He had already done to convince them that He was the Son of God. Miracles alone did not convince people that the Lord is the one and only Savior of the world. If those Pharisees had come to the Lord with sincere hearts, the story that Mark would have been able to tell us would have been completely different.

So the Lord left Dalmanutha. He and His disciples got into the boat and “departed to the other side” (Mark 8:13). This evidently means that they crossed over to the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee. It seems very likely that what we are told in verses 14 through 21 took place while they were in the boat, crossing the Sea of Galilee. So my second point is:

II. THE LORD AND HIS DISCIPLES IN A BOAT CROSSING THE SEA OF GALILEE (Mark 8:14-21).

Verse 14 tells us what the disciples were thinking; verse 15 tells us what the Lord Jesus was thinking. Evidently this trip across the Sea of Galilee had not been in the original plan, and so the disciples carried on an investigation among themselves to find out how much food they had. To their dismay they discovered that they only had one loaf – which would have been lunch for one man but that was all. And evidently they were all very concerned about it.

The Lord, however, while He knew what was going on among the disciples, took this as an opportunity to teach the disciples, thus giving them additional training for the work that He had called them to do. They had just come from that troubling contact with the Pharisees who were in Dalmanutha, and so the Lord and the disciples had them freshly in their minds – as well as bread.

Therefore, the warning. (See it in verse 15.)

From the Lord’s statement in verse 15 it is clear that the trouble with the Pharisees was not going to go away. The Lord did not call, or charge, His disciples to fight the Pharisees, or to try to do what the Pharisees would

try to do to them. He wanted them to know that the Pharisees were enemies, and so were the Herodians. In Matthew's account of this time in our Lord's ministry, he wrote that the Lord said, "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees." So there must have been a connection between the Herodians and the Sadducees. All three groups were made up of Jews. The Sadducees denied the existence of supernatural beings. They denied the doctrine of the resurrection. Many Jews looked up Herod's family as their major hope of freedom from the tyranny of Rome. Thus it was political in nature and would have been more attractive to the Sadducees than the Pharisees who were more orthodox.

There is much that we don't know about leaven, what effect it had upon bread. Leaven was leftover dough which was allowed to ferment. When a new batch of bread was prepared, sometimes the leaven dough was mixed with the fresh dough until the fresh dough was permeated by the leaven. But it was looked down upon by the Jews generally because it was a symbol to them of *corruption*. And so the Lord was warning His disciples that there was corruption in the Pharisees, there was corruption in the Sadducees, and in their relationship with the Herodians. The Herodians would be inclined to place Israel's hope in politics, or in government, human alliances, which is what is true of many in Israel today. They probably put more hope in their relationship with us than they do in their relationship with God, and surely more so than in their relationship with Christ. The Pharisees had corrupted the Law of God by all of their additions to the Word of God, but their teaching was basically legalistic. The Sadducees would fit in more with the Herodians than with the Pharisees because of their denial of much that was supernatural, and so that would make politicians and a good relationship with other nations more appealing.

But the Lord called it all *leaven, corruption*. Whenever you add anything to the Word of God, you don't improve anything; you corrupt and defile the great truths of the Word of God. Even in our country we hear that democracy is the hope of the world, and yet we are rapidly becoming one of the most, if not the most, corrupt nations on the face of the earth. What the world needs is not democracy; what the world needs is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is our hope. He is our security. He is the only Savior from sin, and sin is our problem. Sin has corrupted us. Sin always has a leavening effect upon individuals and families and nations. We are not going to change the world. The Lord will do that with a new heaven and

a new earth. Our charge from God is to preach the Gospel. Only through the Gospel are lives changed. Only through the Gospel can our lives be pleasing to the Lord. Whatever is not pleasing to the Lord is corrupting. That is why we are against homosexual relationships. That is why we are against abortion. That is why we are against adultery. That is why we stand for righteousness. It is because God has declared Himself against sin in all of its forms, and for that which is good and righteous and holy in His sight. We are not going to rid the world of any of its sins, but we can see people delivered from the corrupting influence of sin and made holy by the power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

However, even with the warning that the Lord sounded, the disciples were still thinking about bread, that they only had one loaf among the thirteen of them. See verse 15. And this was more than the Lord could take from them. And so He threw a whole bundle of questions at them. And let us remember that the purpose of questions is to get answers. The Lord wanted answers from them. He knew that what He had been seeking to teach them was not getting through into their hearts.

From verse 17 down to the end of our text in verse 21 I count *nine question marks, nine questions our Lord asked twelve disciples as they made their way across the Sea of Galilee in a boat.* Let's go through them. And they add up to mean, Why are you concerned about bread when I have given you abundant evidence that if I can feed five thousand men with women and children on five loaves and a few fish, and can feed four thousand men, with women and children with seven loaves and a few fish, and have twelve baskets full left over the first time, and seven baskets of food left over the second time, then what are you spending your time worrying that all we have is one loaf for thirteen of us.

You talk about majoring in minors, that is what the disciples were doing. They were worried about having enough bread, when they should have been heart-broken because of the attitude of the Pharisees Who had rejected the One Who is the Bread of life for their leaven, their sin, which can only do one thing, and that is to seal their doom in hell.

John Mark, as he was led by the Spirit of God to write this account that we have considered today, stops so abruptly that we are left almost in shock. I would like to know how the disciples answered Him. Matthew tells us in his account of this event just that the Lord was not talking to them about the leaven of break, but about the doctrine of the Pharisees

and the Sadducees – and let me add from Mark's Gospel, of the Herodians! Our works will not save us, as the Pharisees would have us believe. Government is not going to save us, as the Herodians would have us believe. Skepticism is not going to save us like the Sadducees would have us believe. Christ is the only Savior. He is the only One Who can and will cleanse us from the corrupting influence of all that God has declared to be sin.

Concl: Now let me close by saying this. All of this has been written in our Bibles, not just to tell us how the Lord rebuked His disciples, and sought to get their eyes open and their ears open, but it is there for us too. There is much in this passage for all of us, Christian and non-Christian. Make sure that your eyes are open, and your ears are open, and that you are remembering what the Lord has been seeking to teach you. Read your Bible. That is where you will find the truth about God, about Christ, and about yourself that you need to know.