

SERIES: “A Journey into Forgiveness”

A Leaven of Hypocrisy – Matthew 16:5-12

Illustration - Most products we purchase have labels warning about improper use. I found a great list of these kinds of warnings. Believe it or not, these are all real.

- a. A label on a snow sled which says: "Beware: sled may develop high speed under certain snow conditions."
- b. A fishing lure, with a warning that reads: harmful if swallowed.
- c. A warning on an electric router made for carpenters cautions: "This product not intended for use as a dental drill."
- d. A warning label found on a baby stroller cautions the user to "Remove child before folding"
- e. A container of underarm deodorant says, "Caution: Do not spray in eyes"
- f. A cartridge for a laser printer warns, "Do not eat toner"
- g. A cardboard car sunshield that keeps sun off the dashboard warns, "Do not drive with sunshield in place"

We can laugh about these, and think, who would be foolish enough to need such warnings? But apparently someone did something goofy enough, or some lawyer, thinks somebody is, or will be, foolish enough, or should we say, stupid enough, to think about eating toner from a laser printer cartridge, or driving with the sunshade in place.

Thankfully, God gives us warnings that make much more sense. In our Gospel today we have Jesus giving His disciples and us a warning and a command. This warning from Jesus to His disciples is the same warning He has for us and this generation. Listen to His words. Matt. 16:6 "Watch and beware," Jesus said to them, "of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

Did you hear the seriousness in His voice and the warning in His words? Jesus was not making small idle conversation here. He was giving His disciples a serious warning in the form of a command to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

The Greek word for the warning "watch and beware" is *horao*, which literally means to clearly see and take notice. Jesus is literally saying; don't be fooled here. Don't get taken by surprise; pay very close attention to the leaven of Pharisees. To understand what this warning means for us, we must first understand the Biblical meaning of leaven.

In the days of Jesus, leaven was used for many purposes and it was especially used as a form of yeast to cause dough to rise in bread. They would save a small piece of unbaked dough and use it to start the next batch of dough. It only took a small piece of leaven /yeast to cause the whole batch of dough to rise.

Throughout the New Testament, the spiritual meaning regarding leaven has almost always represented evil and false teaching. So here's the point. Just as a little amount of leaven, can affect a whole batch of unbaked dough; in the same way just a little bit of false teaching and spiritual deception can also affect the outcome of your life and your eternal destiny.

This is exactly why Jesus was so concerned and why He warned His disciples to stay away from the influence and the false teachings of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. He compared their teachings to leaven because like leaven and yeast, their false teachings had the power to spread and have a terrible effect and influence on so many lives.

So, what is the leaven or false teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees? The Pharisees believed they could earn God's favor and earn a place in His kingdom. They believed they could work their way into heaven and earn righteousness by their works and attitude. That type of false teaching is extremely dangerous and it is a teaching that so many have bought into. There are many who believe that if they are good enough they can earn the right to enter into God's kingdom.

However, the Bible plainly tells us there is only way into heaven and that is through Jesus Christ. It is faith in Jesus Christ and what He did for us by dying on the cross for us and rising three days later to give us life and salvation, which writes our name in the Lamb's book of Life.

The Pharisees also viewed themselves better than most because of their works and would stand in judgment of others. Sound familiar? Can't that happen to us, too? **Dallas, were you able to find that piece of video from the Ash Wednesday service? I overheard part of a conversation. Let's zoom in and see if we can hear what they were saying...SKIT (video)**

Yes, even followers of Christ can get confused and deceived. After the warning, I believe Jesus gives us four things to do to protect ourselves from spiritual blindness and deception.

FIRST, GUARD YOUR HEART - Matt 16:6 in the NIV translation says: "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

The first thing we must do is guard our hearts and stand against the false deception of the world. We must guard against allowing the world and its priorities to turn us away from the things of God and from following and obeying God's purpose.

How do I do that? The best way to guard against spiritual deception is to know and live by the word of God. The truth of God's word holds the power to unmask religious deception and false teachings. Second, we are to focus our lives on spiritual things and not on earthly things. Matt 16:7 says, "They discussed this among themselves and said, 'It is because we didn't bring any bread.'"

The problem is the disciples were still focused on earthly things rather than the things of God. They were so focused on what they didn't have, that they completely failed to see what they did have. They had with them the eternal Son of God, but just like the Pharisees, they were blind to Him being right there. We need to shift our focus from the things of this world to the eternal things of God.

SECOND, WE NEED SPIRITUAL PERCEPTION - In 16:8 we hear, "But Jesus, aware of this, said, "O you of little faith, why are you discussing among yourselves the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive?"

The disciples thought Jesus was rebuking them for not having brought any bread, when instead He was trying to teach them an important lesson. They had quickly forgotten the mighty things they had seen the Lord do.

If we are to spiritually survive in this world of sin and deception, we need revelation that comes from spiritual perception.

Spiritual perception is gained by having faith in God; by applying the truth of His word to your life; and by the wisdom that comes from the Holy Spirit.

THIRD, REMEMBER WHAT GOD HAS DONE - Matt 16:9-10 – “Do you not yet perceive? Don't you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many baskets you gathered?”

I can almost picture this scene in my mind. Now, we know the disciples are sometimes a little slow in catching on to things. I can picture Jesus rolling His eyes and saying, surely you remember when I fed the 5000 and the 4000? Surely you remember how much was left over?

The key word is to remember. So many times we forget the great and wonderful things God has done. We forget His love, grace and mercy. We forget the times He carried us when we could not go another step. We forget the times He spoke against the powers of darkness on our behalf. We forget His death and resurrection. We forget that by His blood our names are written in His eternal book of Life.

Remember Jesus; remember His words to us; remember His forgiveness; remember that He is with us; remember He has prepared for us a place in His eternal kingdom that will never end. Remember the Lord; remember His word; remember His truth; As you remember, believe in Him.

FOURTH, UNDERSTAND AND PERCEIVE WHAT GOD IS DOING - In verses 11-12 we hear, “How is it that you fail to understand that I did not speak about bread? 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 teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

It was only after the disciples focused on Jesus, and tuned into what He was saying that they were able to understand what He really meant. To survive the great deception of this generation, we must tune our hearts to hear Jesus' words and to carefully listen to what He is saying.

Before we are too hard on the disciples we must also take a close look at our own lives and see how we fit into this picture. I can assure you there have been times the Lord must have wondered how could Jon not get that. How could Jon not see that? How could Jon have missed what I was doing?

I am sure there have been times in all of our lives when the Lord has had to teach us the same truths over and over. His faithfulness and compassion to teach me and guide me is both overwhelming and humbling.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ: We must not allow the cares of this world, the false teachings of this world, and spiritual blindness to turn our hearts from Christ. We must not allow our hearts to grow hard and cold toward Him and His truth.

The leaven of Satan is hypocrisy and deception and evil. The leaven of God is forgiveness, mercy, grace, and unending love. By the Spirit's power let's guard our hearts and focus on Jesus. Amen.

THE DRAMA ... From Ashes to Ashes

#1 Elaine, just what do you think of this “ashes thing, anyway?”

#2 Oh, I don’t know. We do it every year on Ash Wednesday. It’s a sign of repentance, you know, being sorry for your sins and all.

#1 I know what’s it’s for, but well, it’s just plain hypocritical to me. I mean, look who’s up there.

#2 What do you mean?

#1 John and Elizabeth Smith! He’s practically flaunted his affair and she’s gone out now and found herself a new boyfriend and they pretend to be married. I mean, what do those ashes mean to them, anyway?

#2 Gee, Carol, aren’t you being a bit judgmental here?

#1 Well, no - well, yes, I guess. Look now - there’s Todd Nelson. I’ll bet he’s really repentant.

#2 Yeah, I do see what you mean. After all, he hasn’t apologized one bit to his grandparents for trashing their house and front yard with his fraternity party. In fact, I must admit he’s still bragging about it to his friends, even Carl.

#1 You’re kidding! He’s bragging to your son? He’s got to know that will get back to his grandparents.

#2 Oh no, not me. I’m not getting involved in his mess.

#1 No kidding, he’s just headed for plain trouble. With no folks and only doting grandparents, he’ll be lucky if he gets through his second year of college without ending up in the state penitentiary. Oh, look, there’s Cathy Jones. I’m glad she’s going up there, poor thing. It’s not fair, her good name getting dragged through that scandal at work. No one believes her. At least her boss doesn’t dare show his face around here. And to think he taught that men’s Bible study - you just never know.

#2 Well, that’s not what I heard. I heard they were all in it together to try to take over the company (just then the organ begins softly playing Just As I Am) Shhhhh, we better sing. The organ is starting up again.

(The two of them begin singing “Just As I Am” - do the first verse, then soften the organ tone.)

#2 Carol, the usher is nodding to us. I want to go up.

#1 Oh, go ahead.

#2 Aren’t you coming?

#1 No, I’m not into this ceremony-stuff. Too hypocritical for me. I’ll just keep singing.

#2 Well, ceremony or not, I need it, especially after this conversation.

#1 What?

#2 Never mind, Carol, I don't think you'd understand anyway -- just sing.

(Elaine shrugs off her friend and goes "up" to receive communion and ashes. Carol sings verse #2 of the hymn and she takes a notebook out of her purse and begins to write her grocery list. She mumbles off singing the hymn and ends with a soft yet audible, "I hope the roast doesn't burn before we get home from church tonight.")

Read Matthew 16: 6-12, remembering that the disciples had just seen Jesus feed over 4,000 people and they themselves picked up all the left-over food!

A. Were the disciples concerned more about physical things or spiritual things?

B. What was the source of their "irritation?"

C. Jesus rebuked them in the right fashion, for they learned the lesson and began to understand (Verses 8-12).

THINK: The "leaven of hypocrisy" corrupts the church. What kind of 'yeast' are you feeding yourself with and what kind of bread are you producing?

3. God Does Not Take Hypocrisy 'Lightly' ... Mark 12: 38-40

Read Mark 12: 38-40 and dwell a moment on verse 40. Now apply these lessons of "spiritual truths:"

(1) Mental darkness (John 1:5-8, 26). The minds of sinners are blinded by Satan (2 Cor. 4:3-6), and they cannot see spiritual truths.

(2) Moral darkness (John 3:18-21). The unsaved love sin and hate the light.

(3) Judicial darkness (John 12:35-36). If men don't obey the light, God sends the darkness and Christ hides from them.

(4) Eternal darkness (John 12:46). To "abide" in darkness means to live in hell forever.

4. The TRAP is Set ... Will YOU Get Caught in It?

Read Luke 22: 66-71. The trap for Jesus is set with verse 70. You and I can fit in that same trap. What is this trap?

1. Blindness to the Word of God.

The elders and chief priests and teachers of the law KNEW the Scriptures but they had become blind to their meaning, settling for what was popular, what fit their own plans and lifestyle. Can you see yourself in this?

2. Deaf to the Word of God.

Again, the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law had HEARD Jesus preach and teach for 3 years. Everything He taught was in alignment with Scripture and He always referred to Scripture to back up His teaching. God speaks to us today through ministers, teachers, friends and family. Are we listening?

5. The “leaven of Satan is hypocrisy and all evil” — the “leaven of God is forgiveness, mercy, grace, and unending love”

The “wily ways of Satan” — Matthew 4: 1-11, Matthew 13: 36-43, Acts 13: 9-11, 2 Cor. 2: 9-11 & 4:4 & 11: 12-15, 1 Peter 5:6-9

The “grace-full” ways of God -- Jeremiah 29:11, John 3:16-17, 1 John 1: 5-10, Psalm 103: 1-5, 1 Cor. 16_ 13-14, James 1: 21-27, 1 Timothy 4: 1-7, Romans 16:20, Rev. 2:10

END

Some closing quips about HYPOCRISY...

Hypocrites in the church? Yes, and in the lodge, and at home. Don't hunt through the church for a hypocrite. Go home and look in the glass. Hypocrites? Yes. See that you make the number one less. ... Billy Sunday (1862 1935)

Jesse James killed a fellow in a bank robbery and shortly thereafter was baptized in the Kearney Baptist Church. Then he killed another man, a bank cashier, and joined the church choir and taught hymn singing. He liked Sundays, Jesse did, but he couldn't always show up at church. On two Sundays, he robbed trains.

Some churches train their greeters and ushers to smile, showing as many teeth as possible. But I can sense that kind of display and when I am greeted by a man who is smiling because he has been trained to smile, I know I am shaking the flipper of a trained seal. ... A. W. Tozer (1897 1963)

The world is glad of an excuse not to listen to the gospel message, and the inconsistencies of Christians is the excuse. Oswald Chambers (1874 1917)

We are split spiritual personalities. We swear allegiance to one set of principles and live by another. We extol self control and practice self indulgence--We proclaim brotherhood and harbor prejudice--We laud character but strive to climb to the top at any cost--We erect houses of worship, but our shrines are our places of business and recreation--We are suffering from a distressing cleavage between the truths we affirm and the values we live by. Our souls are the battlegrounds for civil wars, but we are trying to live serene lives in houses divided against themselves. ... Melvin F. Wheatley

Keith Miller puts it this way: It has never ceased to amaze me that we Christians have developed a kind of selective vision which allows us to be deeply and sincerely involved in worship and church activities and yet almost totally pagan in the day in, day out guts of our business lives and never realize it.

Years ago in Germany there was a young Jewish boy who had a profound sense of admiration for his father. The life of the family centered around the acts of piety and devotion prescribed by their religion. The father was zealous in attending worship and instruction and demanded the same from his children. While the boy was a teenager the family was forced to move to another town in Germany. In the new location there was no synagogue, and the pillars of the community all belonged to the Lutheran church. Suddenly the father announced to the family that they were all going to abandon their Jewish traditions and join the Lutheran church. When the stunned family asked why, the father explained that it was necessary to help his business. The youngster was bewildered and confused. His deep disappointment soon gave way to anger and a kind of intense bitterness that plagued him throughout his life. He left Germany and went to England to study. He sat daily at the British Museum formulating his ideas and composing a book. In that book he introduced a whole life and world view and conceived of a movement that was designed to change the world. In the book he described religion as an "opiate for the masses" that could be explained totally in terms of economics. Today there are billions of people in the world who live under the system invented by this embittered man. His name, of course, is Karl Marx. The influence of this father's hypocrisy is still being keenly felt around the world. R. C. Sproul, *Objections Answered*.