

2026-01-25

Beware

Mark 8:13-21

Caution. Cuidado. Look out! Beware. Danger. Peligro! We put these warning signs up so that we are more careful in these areas. There is the potential that we can get hurt if we are not careful. When we are driving, there are those yellow road signs. All of them are caution signs to make us more aware of our surroundings in those areas. There is the potential for accidents when we are not paying attention. We go to our doctor appointments and have our blood pressure taken, our blood checked, MRI's or stress tests taken or X-rays. The doctor is checking for warning signs from our body so we can be aware of **potential health problems**. There are times that we can get so used to these warning signs that we tend not to notice them and we go about our day.

Jesus cautioned the disciples about the teachings of the Pharisees, scribes and Herod. People can say and teach many things that sound true and may contain some truth but they mix those truths with other teachings or traditions or customs that can change their meaning or how they are to be understood and applied. Satan did this to Jesus when he tempted Jesus in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11). It is interesting that Jesus told the disciples to "*Beware.*" He did not tell them to "Never listen to a thing they say." There is a word that means, "*Keep yourself from*" (Acts 21:25). Jesus did not use that word here. There have been people who have come to me, asking, "Should I watch this preacher on TV? Is it OK to read this book?" Depending on who they are, I have told people not to watch certain preachers and not to read certain books. To others I tend to tell them to listen carefully to what is being taught. Beware of the things being said. If you can, look at the life and lifestyle of those teaching and preaching. See if their lives match up with what they teach. Jesus told the disciples to, "Beware," because He was not going to be around all the time. They needed to learn to be discerning just as we do. God gave us a brain to use. We are to know God's truths and live them out in our lives. We should be aware of false teaching. We are warned in scripture that there will be a "*falling away*" from God's truth as we get near the end of time (Matthew 24:24 / 2 Thessalonians 2:3 / 2 Peter 3:3). Let's see how the disciples did early in their training.

Mark 8:13-14 "*And He left them, and getting into the boat again, departed to the other side. Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, and they did not have more than one loaf with them in the boat.*" Jesus left the thousands of people that He had just fed. He got into the boat with the disciples and headed across the lake again. "*Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread.*" Have you ever walked out of your

house and forgotten something? It happens to me about every day. Fortunately, I generally remember and go back inside to get what I had forgotten. Here, the disciples forgot to get some bread. One of the disciples was responsible for their money (John 13:29). I wonder if one of the disciples was assigned to be in charge of their food. It seems to be a natural assignment but we are not told about anyone. At least one disciple brought along one loaf of bread. Maybe the disciples were getting a bit more confident that Jesus could supply whatever they needed when they needed it. What happened to those seven large baskets of leftover fragments? (Mark 8:9). My guess is those thousands of families took what they needed for their journey home. I doubt if those baskets were left sitting in the wilderness.

Verse 15 *“Then He charged them, saying, ‘Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.’”* How would you take this? As we will see the disciples got it wrong **at first**. Again, it is interesting that Mark does not include what Jesus was meaning. In Matthew’s account it is recorded, *“Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees”* (16:12). Leaven or yeast was a symbol of sin. This teaching has its roots in the Passover (Exodus 12:7). During the **Feast of the Passover**, the Hebrew people were also celebrating an addition feast, the **Feast of Unleavened Bread**. They celebrated two feasts at the same time. For the Passover, a lamb was killed and its blood was spread around the door as a symbol of the actual event of Jesus death and His blood being poured out on the cross to save us from spiritual death. For the Feast of Unleavened Bread, **all leaven was removed** from the home as a symbol that all sin was removed. Jesus’ death on the cross and His burial actually removed the stain of sin in our lives when we believe and trust Jesus as Lord. Isaiah prophesied, *“‘Come now, and let us reason together,’ says the Lord, ‘Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall be as wool’”* (1:18). **Through faith in Jesus this is true.** Jesus’ death and burial paid the debt for all our sins (Hebrews 9:26-28 / 1 John 2:2). We can be forgiven through faith in Jesus. The leaven of the Pharisees was their false teaching that forgiveness and salvation can happen by some other way.

Verse 16 *“And they reasoned among themselves, saying, ‘It is because we have no bread.’”* The disciples talked among themselves trying to figure out what Jesus was saying and why He said it. They wondered why Jesus would caution them about leaven. Maybe the disciples thought they should beware of the bread the Pharisee and Herod ate. Could it be that the leaven in their bread was bad? No, that cannot be. That does not make any sense. Maybe, since Jesus had just fed thousands of people with **bread**, since they collected seven large baskets full of leftover fragments of **bread**, since they had forgotten to bring enough **bread** with them, and since **bread**

has **leaven** in it, and since Jesus mentioned **leaven**, the disciples reasoned that Jesus was warning them because **someone forgot to bring more bread**. Who was responsible to bring some bread along for their trip? Does that make any sense? Well, to the disciples that was all they could come up with for the moment.

Verses 17-20 *“But Jesus, being aware of it, said to them, ‘Why do you reason because you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart still hardened? 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 fragments did you take up?’ They said to Him, ‘Twelve.’ ‘Also, when I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of fragments did you take up?’ And they said, ‘Seven.’”* Here we find Jesus sitting in the boat watching the disciples discuss among themselves what Jesus was talking about. **Jesus loved to make statements that made people think. He also loved to ask questions to make people think.** As you read through the gospels, when Jesus makes a statement or asks a question, stop and think. Pray and ask God for a deeper understanding. Ask God for wisdom and insight so that we understand correctly all that Jesus is wanting us to know and understand.

Jesus asked the disciples, *“Why do you reason because you have no bread?”* Did Jesus’ statement, *“Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod”* have anything to do with bread? No! He asked them, *“Do you not yet perceive nor understand?”* At this point they did not. He asked, *“Is your **heart** still hardened? Having **eyes**, do you not see? And having **ears**, do you not hear?”* Their hearts were hard. They did not see correctly. They did not hear correctly. They were still thinking about their own mistake of not bringing more bread. Jesus asked, *“And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments did you take up?” They said to Him, ‘Twelve.’ ‘Also, when I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of fragments did you take up?’ And they said, ‘Seven.’”* The disciples did remember it was about bread when feeding these two groups of thousands. The disciples learned that Jesus can provide an abundance for all. They learned He has compassion for people. They learned that they can believe His teachings because He proves His words with action.

So, *“Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod”* The Pharisees, Herod, the Sadducees, the scribes, they **do not have compassion** on the people. They make life harder for people not better. If they did have compassion they would do something to help the people. The disciples must be careful about their teachings because there was no proof by their actions that what they taught was true. We can believe the teachings of Jesus. Everything He says He proves by His actions.

Verse 21 “*So He said to them, ‘How is it you do not understand?’*” Of course, it is not about bread! I am glad for Matthew’s account so that **we know the answer** to this question. The disciples did finally understand after these questions. “*Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees*” (16:12). The disciples learned they were to beware of the teachings of religious leaders and government leaders. If the teachings agreed with scripture, then believe them. If they do not, then do not believe them. That means we need to study scripture so that we know what is true and we are not led astray by false teachings.

We also find that Jesus spoke of **leaven as referring to hypocrisy**. “*In the meantime, when an innumerable multitude of people had gathered together, so that they trampled one another, He began to say to His disciples first of all, ‘Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.’*” The Pharisees would treat people differently. If they liked you, they treated you nice. If the Pharisees hated you, they treated you very poorly. They had a double standard if they actually thought through how they treated people.

Leaven was also seen as **malice** and **wickedness**, malice being a desire to see someone suffer harm and evil. Paul wrote, “*Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*” (1 Corinthians 5:6-8). Letting sin or playing with a little sin in our lives affects our whole being. We cannot keep sin in a little compartment in our life. It will find a way to influence our total being. The purpose of Jesus’ death was to remove the stain of all sin from us. We should **purge out the sin** of malice and wickedness in our lives and live in sincerity and the truth of Jesus.

Questions to ask yourself: Do you let sin or Jesus rule your life? Are you believing false doctrine or the truth? How do you know? **Actions to take:** Study God’s word. Believe and keep the teachings of Jesus. He will reveal Himself to you (John 14:21).

Contact information:

Pastor Daniel Fosnight
602-321-5629 talk or text
email: dfosnight@cox.net

Join us for worship every Sunday at:

Emmanuel Baptist Church of Sun City
12225 N. 103rd Avenue **10:00 A.M.**
Sun City, AZ 85351 **& 4:00 P.M.**

Our mailing address is: Emmanuel Baptist Church, P.O. Box 1388, Sun City, AZ 85372

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Teach believers to worship God; Foster growth in the Christian faith