

SERIES: GETTING TO KNOW JESUS

SUBJECT: PROTECTING OUR FAITH

SCRIPTURE: MARK 8:1-21

SERMON NO. 18

Introduction

The apostle Paul wrote in his letter of pastoral advice to his young disciple, Timothy, “**Keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and opposition of science falsely so called.**” (1 Timothy 6:20). Timothy was to guard his faith. Paul was saying, keep away from things and circumstances that will dull your relationship with God to the point where it loses its vitality and loses its meaning to your life.

If our relationship with God is not given proper attention, our faith will become dull, lose its vitality, and meaning. How do we guard our faith?

I. THE ENCOUNTER WITH THE PHARISEES (1-9). **In those days the multitude being very great, and having nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples unto him, and saith unto them, 2 I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat:**

The feeding of the 4000, is a different miracle than what we studied a few weeks ago, when Jesus fed 5000 people with five loaves and two fish. The word “basket” used in both miracles has two different meanings. In feeding the 5000 it means a small amount like a sack lunch; in feeding the 4000 it means a large

basket of fish that the fisherman took his catch to the market. In this miracle there were 7 large baskets of fish left over.

II. ANOTHER GROUP OF PHARISEES WANT A SIGN (10-13). *And straightway he entered into a ship with his disciples, and came into the parts of Dalmanutha. 11 And the Pharisees came forth, and began to question with him, seeking of him a sign from heaven, tempting him. They didn't need another sign...*

All the Pharisees needed was to look at his accomplishments. The calming of the storm on the Sea of Galilee that was witnessed by several other ships; the feeding of the 5000; the healing of the demon possessed man; the blind who received sight, the deaf who could now hear, and the mute who could now speak. Just a few hours earlier, Jesus feed the 4000.

But these Pharisees wanted more. They were looking for a higher kind of sign directly from heaven that would validate Jesus' ministry. And at their unbelief, Jesus sighs (12a).

He says, "No way are you going to get this kind of sign from me. You are the people's religious leaders. You have had a good synagogue education. You should know what the Scriptures teach. You should know the things the Messiah would do. I am doing all those things! You don't need anything more, so nothing more will be given to you.

In disgust, Jesus tells his disciples to get back in the boat, and they leave.

III. THE DISCIPLES HAD FORGOTTEN TO TAKE THE BREAD (14). Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, neither had they in the ship with them more than one loaf.

In their haste to leave, the disciples forgot to bring the seven large baskets of leftover bread from the feeding of the 4000 with them.

Obviously, the disciples were feeling guilty, and maybe even a little hungry. It was getting to be dinner time, and it was their fault that they had nothing to eat. They had leftovers from the miracle, but they left the 7 baskets of leftovers on the shore. So the topic of discussion among these hungry men was about food.

After a while on the lake, Jesus, calms down from His anger and disgust with the Pharisees, and He decides to use that confrontation as a teachable moment. *So He gives them a charge...*

Mark 8:15 Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod. In Jewish tradition, yeast or leaven not only referred to bread..., but in a moral sense it referred to evil. And that's what Jesus meant in verse 15.

Mark 8:16 They reasoned among themselves, saying, It is because we have no bread. They missed Jesus' point all together. They heard yeast and thought bread. Jesus said yeast, and meant evil. They were thinking, "Even Jesus is hungry, and wants to know where the leftovers are."

Like a teacher in a class of unruly kids, Jesus had to direct their line of reasoning from bread and food to what He wanted to teach them about faith and the pitfalls of evil...

Mark 8:17a When Jesus knew it, he saith unto them, Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? Perceive ye not yet, neither understand? Have ye your heart yet hardened? In other words, "Guys, get your minds off your stomachs and food. I'm talking about EVIL here! Beware of the EVIL of the Pharisees and the EVIL of Herod."

IV. THERE ARE TWO ATTITUDES TO GUARD AGAINST.

Herod and the Pharisees represent two attitudes that we need to be aware of, and avoid at all costs. Because these attitudes will dilute our faith. *Let's look at them.*

1. The Pharisees believed that God was only interested in your performance of good works. The Pharisees were sticklers about keeping the letter of the law. But keeping the law never affected what was inside. They twisted the law so much that they found loopholes that would get them out of taking care of their parents in their old age. They kept the law on the outside, but inside they didn't have a heart that cared about what was really important to God. They established their own brand of religion.

That still happens today. Groups of Christians still try to establish their own faith. Let me give you some examples of laws that are still on the books, that are a result of Christians in specific communities, trying to establish true faith. Young girls are never allowed to walk a tightrope in Wheeler, Mississippi, unless it's in a church. In Blackwater, Kentucky, tickling a woman under her chin with a feather duster while she's in church service carries a penalty of \$10.00 and one day in jail. No one can eat unshelled, roasted peanuts while attending church in Idanha, Oregon. In Honey Creek, Iowa, no one is permitted to carry a slingshot to church

except a policeman. No citizen in Leecreek, Arkansas, is allowed to attend church in any red-colored garment. Swinging a yo-yo in church or anywhere in public on the Sabbath is prohibited in Studley, Virginia. Turtle races are not permitted within 100 yards of a local church at any time in Slaughter, Louisiana. (Robert W. Pelton in *The Door*. Christian Reader, Vol. 33, no. 5).

The evil of the Pharisees is thinking that correct performance, outward obedience, proper conduct, and following a specific list of do's and don't's is what God's interested in. But friends, if the substance of your faith is: do's and don't's; rules and regulations; and performance and accomplishments... it will eventually become dull and lifeless. It will lack excitement. And eventually your faith will become lethargic, apathetic, dull and lifeless. And you will have no hope to offer anyone, including yourself.

2. Herod cared so much about his reputation, that he had John the Baptist beheaded simply because he couldn't find a graceful way to get out of a drunken oath that he made to a stripper.

Friends, if you're more interested in doing what makes you acceptable or popular to others, than what makes you acceptable to God, you are guilty of the evil of Herod. God is no longer the leader of your life. That makes your faith irrelevant and boring.

In these verses, Jesus asks four key questions to help us examine our faith to see if we're in danger of becoming like Herod or the Pharisees.

1. Do you still not see or understand? (17). In other words Jesus is saying, "Use your mind". Consider how much you know about God. Stop and think about how little you knew when you first

began following Jesus, and now how much more you know. So use it during the course of your day. Apply it. Don't be intentionally ignorant. Draw upon the knowledge you have so far. And if that's not enough, get more, by going to the Book!

2. Are your hearts hardened? (17b).

Friends, honestly look at your heart-that part of you that controls your emotions and feelings. Is that center core of your being dull to the things of God or is it excited about what He's doing?

"If the heart does not respond to what the mind has understood, it's because you have not really believed it. You may have recognized mentally that it is true, but you have not acted upon it. You do not really believe God is going to do what He has said He will do, that is the problem."

Do you get excited when someone is baptized? -Do you get excited when new people come to our church and want to join? -Do you get excited when you hear of children and adults making a decision to follow Jesus Christ as the forgiver of their sins and the leader of their life, through the people and ministries of our church?

Friends, if you don't get excited about things like these then your heart is hard! Your intellect knows these things are good, but your heart hasn't grabbed a hold of them. One of the things the Bible suggests we do for a hard heart is to pray that the eyes of our heart would see, and that our hearts would become soft again to what really matters to God, and what He's doing in our midst.

3. Do you have eyes that fail to see, or ears that fail to hear? (18). Jesus used very similar terminology in just about every

teaching opportunity He received. And each time He means the same thing. Don't simply look at things with blinders around your eyes and ear plugs in your ears. That leads to selfishness and only thinking about yourself. When you accepted Jesus as your Savior, you were giving up being at the center of things, God wants that place. As His follower, your values, goals and desires are not what's important, God's are.

The experiences of your life and the people in your life are there for a purpose-God's purpose. He is superintending those things and those people for His purposes. Wake up. Open your eyes.

4. Don't you remember? (18). He goes on to say, "I fed 5000 and there was more than enough. I fed 4000 and there was more than enough. Haven't you learned anything?"

Conclusion

Folks, Remember what God did in the past. Then realize He's still the same God. He's the God who parted the Red Sea. He's the God who won battle after battle for the Israelites. He's the God who healed the sick and raised the dead. He's the God who, Himself, conquered death. He's the God who saved you from eternal Hell. He's the God who provided all your needs.

Jesus' point is that a person of dull faith forgets what God did in the past, and that dooms him or her to a lack of abundance in living. Folks, protect you faith!