

Jesus and the disciples had been quite a while ministering in Gentile regions. First it was the Syrophenician woman, and then up to Tyre, followed by the trip through the Decapolis and ending with the feeding of the 4000 with three days of teaching and healing. They are finally heading back to the northern shores of Galilee. But had the disciples understood the lesson that God loves Gentiles as much as He loves the Jews (John 3:16<sup>i</sup>)? Did they see Jesus as the God who provides?

<sup>14</sup> *Now they had forgotten to bring bread, and they had only one loaf with them in the boat.* Mark 8:14 Once in the boat they probably started around of, “I thought you were supposed to bring the bread.” Was their forgetfulness due to the abundance of leftovers, or the excitement of what had taken place? At least someone brought one loaf, but those loaves were smaller than what we think of as a loaf and not much for 13 men. You would think at least one of them would have a sense of logistics, perhaps Matthew. One of those large baskets they collected would have been more than enough for several days. Where did they go? Perhaps they were given to needy families.

<sup>15</sup> *And he cautioned them, saying, “Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.”* Mark 8:15 *In Matthew leaven seems to be equated with false teaching, while in Luke it is equated with hypocrisy.*<sup>ii</sup> The sense here when applied to both the Pharisees and Herod is corruption. Pharisees had their corrupt uses of the oral laws to nullify Scriptural duty (7:10-13<sup>iii</sup>) or oppress the people with burdensome demands (Matthew 23:4<sup>iv</sup>). Herod was a picture of compromise with Rome for financial benefit and power. Both were seductive compromises for personal benefit. Leaven causes an expansion without additional substance. The effect is slow, steady, and thorough.

Jesus may have been pondering how the fallen nature of man justifies self-indulgence while trying to appear to have good motives. The Pharisees and Herod could not have been more different, but the evil in their hearts was the same. They just manifested it differently. Jesus was warning to the disciples was profound. Perhaps Jesus was even thinking ahead when the church would begin to grow in the world. Those two manifestations of the fallen heart of man would be the two biggest problems for the church, abuse of authority and compromising indulgence for personal gain.

On the one hand you have spiritual leaders who look very dedicated and sincere, but their heart is after the praise of men and what they can gain from the respect, financially or positionally in an organization. On the other hand, you have leaders who compromise with the world’s ethics to increase the size of the congregation making the message more appealing to the world. We see this everywhere in our day. They teach that there is no such thing as hell, women can have the role of elder, premarital sex is not a sin, that divorce for any reason is understandable, teach following your heart, that God does not speak to us today, that homosexuality is normal and morally neutral, and I could go on and on. People do not want to hear that they are sinners, for that hinders church growth. The leaven of compromise inflates the number of people, and more people means more funds and greater notoriety (8:36,37<sup>v</sup>). This is what Jesus was warning the disciples to be on guard against.

*A little leaven leavens the whole lump*. Galatians 5:9 If there is blatant compromise within the congregation and nothing is said about it, the leaven spreads. Others think it is fine to act in the same way. The testimony of the church is hindered because leadership is afraid to offend someone and lose a donor. Like the churches in the letters of Revelation, before long the candlestick is removed (Revelation 2:5<sup>vi</sup>). Where there was once the light of the gospel, it ceases to shine. Where there are pastors who are popular and thought of highly but have wrong motivations, their sin will find them out in time and the whole church will suffer or even close (Numbers 32:23<sup>vii</sup>).

But there is also a very different kind of leaven. Matthew 13:33 <sup>33</sup> *He told them another parable. "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour; till it was all leavened."* The gospel spreads quietly and persistently like leaven. When you have the truth of God's Word, when the focus is on what Jesus has done for us, when people are finding new life in Christ, the church will grow. By church I mean the body of believers whether they are part of an organization or not. The Great Commandment tells us the focus should be on our love for God and one another (12:29-31<sup>viii</sup>). When the clear teaching of God's Word is proclaimed and received, lives are blessed. Joy and peace are prevalent. That is attractive too. And when people learn that God's direction is for our good, our standards become quite different from those of the world.

<sup>16</sup> *And they began discussing with one another the fact that they had no bread.* Mark 8:16 What in the world does Jesus' warning have to do with them forgetting to bring bread? If there was ever a reason to question the choice of these block heads, this response was it. They have heard leaven parables. They know that physical things represent spiritual analogies. Suddenly they can only think on the physical plane. Maybe they were in the s-u-n too long instead of being in the S-o-n.

<sup>17</sup> *And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, "Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened?"* Mark 8:17 I do not think Jesus was ever frustrated, but if there ever was a reason to be, this was it. Let me rephrase what Jesus said with tinge of how frustrated I would be. "Why in the world would you think my warning had anything to do with you forgetting to bring bread! What is the matter with you guys! That is so off base I cannot fathom how you would come up with such a ridiculous conclusion." Now of course Jesus is not as crude as I am, but it must have been disappointing at least. We see that disappointment in the series of questions that follow.

Question one: *"Do you not yet perceive or understand?"* They saw the miraculous feeding, heard the sermon on the mount, saw Jesus walk on water, saw Him cast out demons, heal all manner of people, and have gone out to evangelize without taking anything with them (6:8<sup>ix</sup>). Did they learn anything from all that? Had they meditated on the wonder of their experiences with Jesus?

Let us not be like the man in a previous study of Exodus who kept asking how the Jews could be so hard hearted! The Bible is completely honest about our fallen nature (Jeremiah 17:9<sup>x</sup>). The disciples had been doing crowd control for three days, which was right after traveling on foot for at least a week or more. They were tired too and a little testy. Their flesh was rearing its ugly head and when that happens we humans tend to

think on the physical plane. All they heard was “Watch out!” and something about leaven and they started in on who should have brought bread.

We might say they should have known better because of all they had seen and heard. Really? Have I just been preaching to the wind? Do you see how God faithfully meets our needs when I never cajole you to give? Have you seen the lives that came here that were one way and went out completely different people? Have you seen in your own life how God was always faithful to meet your needs, even when you doubted and questioned Him? Did you see how God spared the life of Mariko and LaJean? Have you seen the countless God-incidences? This is a series of questions we might ask ourselves when we start focusing on the physical plane and not seeing the truth of God’s almighty power behind all these events, showing us that we do not need to doubt, fear, or worry. We should be full of faith and never doubt our Lord and know that what He speaks to us is truth we can live by.

The next question is somewhat of a rebuke. “*Are your hearts hardened?*” God have mercy on us when we think the events of life are just physical with no spiritual meaning or lessons to be learned. That is when our hearts are so hard that we live like animals without a soul and existence just means earning a living so we can eat. God is always speaking! Are we listening? He speaks through the events of our lives and all the circumstances we face. He speaks every time we read His Word. Let us not be hard-hearted but believe!

*<sup>18</sup> Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember?* Mark 8:18 Jesus continues with the confrontational questions three through five. Did their eyes not see the loaves and fish multiply? Did they not see lepers instantly cured (1:40-42<sup>xi</sup>)? Did they not see the paralytic take up his mat and walk away? Did their ears not hear Jesus say, “Which is easier to say your sins are forgiven or rise and walk (2:10-12<sup>xii</sup>)? When they asked themselves, “Who is this man?” did their hearts not tell them He is God incarnate (4:41;<sup>xiii</sup> John 14:9,10<sup>xiv</sup>). Did they hear Him say He is Lord of the Sabbath (Luke 6:5<sup>xv</sup>)?

The hammer continues to fall, question after question! Did they not remember how they lacked nothing when they went out to evangelize (6:8<sup>xvi</sup>)? Could they remember a time of going hungry when they were with Jesus? Could they recall Him telling them that He is the bread that came down from heaven (John 6:41,42<sup>xvii</sup>)? Could they recall the people asking Jesus why He never has them fast and how Jesus referred to Himself as the bridegroom (2:19<sup>xviii</sup>)?

I have watched the lives of faithful people who work hard and yet there came a slow time when their business took a downturn, orders were few, and the future looked bleak. They came to me and expressed their concerns, and I told them to trust the Lord, pray, to ask God if there is anything else they can do, and then continue to trust God. Before long things picked up. Then the same thing would happen again years later. I would remind them, like Jesus is reminding the disciples, “*Do you not remember?*” After the third or fourth time they learn the lesson. God is faithful. You can trust Him. One way or the other, He will meet your needs if you look to Him and do what He tells you.

*<sup>19</sup> When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?” They said to him, “Twelve.” <sup>20</sup> “And the seven for the*

*four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?” And they said to him, “Seven.”* Mark 8:19,20 I could be wrong, but I think Jesus is asking the disciples to see the significance in the numbers. 5000 Jews ate and had 12 baskets of leftovers. Jesus is sufficient for the twelve tribes of Israel. He is the living bread for the nation. He is more than enough.

When the 4000 Gentiles ate and there were seven big baskets of leftovers. Seven is the number of fullness or sufficiency. Jesus can be the soul satisfaction for the entire Gentile world. He is more than enough for our physical and spiritual needs. They can eat their fill and be completely satisfied with His Word, life, death, and resurrection. Jew or Gentile can find complete soul satisfaction, peace with our heavenly Father, forgiveness of sins, assurance of eternal life in Jesus. Do we perceive and understand? Are our hearts hardened, or is our next meal all we can think about?

Have you ever caught yourself listening to the middle of a sermon and you start wondering where you are going for lunch, or what you are going to prepare? You are not alone. If you have ever fasted, you know how food often dominates our thoughts. That is what was happening in this passage. Jesus is speaking a meaningful spiritual warning, and they somehow turn it into a discussion about having enough food. If Jesus ever said, “Oye vey!” this would have been the time.

<sup>21</sup> *And he said to them, “Do you not yet understand?”* Mark 8:21 The disciples got the numbers right, but they missed the whole point of the numbers and what Jesus was trying to convey. It is like someone hearing a message on Jeroboam's golden calves, a teaching on what the world substitutes for God. But all they can think about is how Jeroboam could move his feet if his calves were golden. We can miss the whole meaning that is being conveyed. But if we hear a similar message over and over as the disciples surely did, and we do not ask questions or ever get the point, we will be like these disciples who were focused on their stomachs.

Did Jesus ever have a discussion with the heavenly Father, “Abba, are you sure these are the men that You want to use to start your church?” Probably not, but He sure witnessed the weakness of our humanity. Jesus knew that what they were lacking is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit who would fill them at Pentecost. He told them, <sup>16</sup> *And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever,* <sup>17</sup> *even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.* John 14:16,17 <sup>25</sup> *“These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you.* <sup>26</sup> *But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.* John 14:25,26

What we see in this passage is a picture of ourselves without the Holy Spirit or when we walk in the flesh. The man in the Exodus study who kept asking how the Israelites could keep falling away from God needed to look into the mirror and be honest with his own heart. Our failures and hardness of heart remind us that Jesus said, *“Without me you can do nothing.”* John 15:5b

This means we should always be looking to the Lord, asking for His forgiveness, grace, and direction (1 John 1:9,10<sup>xix</sup>). We need to walk in the Spirit with our hearts and minds set on things above (Colossians 3:1<sup>xx</sup>). Be sensitive to those checks in the Spirit.

The more we mature in Christ by yielding daily to Him, the more this becomes the dominate nature within us. We desire what God desires and quickly recognize when the flesh is trying to sneak back in (Psalm 37:4<sup>xxi</sup>). We recognize and believe that He is the Lord of life who orchestrates our days having planned each one before we were born (Psalm 139:16<sup>xxii</sup>). We learn to trust Him and wait on His directions when we are unsure of which way to turn. It is a lifelong battle that is victorious when we surrender our right to ourselves and look to Jesus and obey His leading (Galatians 2:20<sup>xxiii</sup>).

Now let us return to the warning that the disciples misunderstood. *“Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.”* Mark 8:15b *“Sometimes the Jew used the word leaven much as we would use the term original sin, or the natural evil of human nature.”* (Barclay)

Guzik explains, *The work of leaven was considered an illustration of the work of sin and pride. The presence of a little can corrupt a large amount.*

*Take heed, beware: Jesus essentially said, “Beware of the evil way the Pharisees and Herod think of the Kingdom of the Messiah, for in a short time I will reveal the truth of it to you.” Both Herod and the Pharisees idealized the Kingdom as domineering power and authority. Herod saw it more as political power and authority, and the Pharisees saw it as more spiritual power and authority, but they still saw the kingdom in this high-minded way.*<sup>xxiv</sup> Each saw themselves as superior to others who needed their oversight.

If the disciples did not understand that every person on earth needs Jesus, the bread of life, they would soon begin to understand, as we will see in the next two paragraphs that we will go over in the coming weeks.

Do we understand? The One who parts oceans and calls the dead from their graves (Exodus 14:21<sup>xxv</sup>; John 11:43,44<sup>xxvi</sup>) who delays the sun setting so Joshua can finish the battle (Joshua 10:12,13<sup>xxvii</sup>), and who breaks Peter and John out of jail (Acts 5:18-20<sup>xxviii</sup>), Paul and Barnabas too (Acts 16:25,26<sup>xxix</sup>), wants us to understand that He is all we need (Philippians 4:19<sup>xxx</sup>). If we have Him, we have everything (1 Corinthians 4:21,22<sup>xxxi</sup>). The Lord is our Shepherd, and we will never be in want (Psalm 23:1<sup>xxxii</sup>). The kingdom of God is not about being superior to others, but rather it is to serve one another in love (Galatians 5:13<sup>xxxiii</sup>). May we not be block heads, but instead be filled with the Spirit and follow His lead!

Questions:

- 1 What was Jesus’ warning?
- 2 How do we see that played out today?
- 3 What is the other kind of leaven?
- 4 Review the questions Jesus asked and apply them to our lives.
- 5 List some of the clues Jesus gave the disciples as to His identity.
- 6 Do you not remember? Testify!
- 7 What might be the significance in the number of baskets?
- 8 How should it change your life to know who Jesus is?
- 9 How can we rise above our fallen nature?
- 10 What kind of attitude was Jesus telling us to avoid?

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<sup>i</sup> **John 3:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

<sup>ii</sup> Hooker, *Mark*, p 194

<sup>iii</sup> **Mark 7:10-13 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’<sup>11</sup> But you say, ‘If a man tells his father or his mother, “Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban”’ (that is, given to God)—<sup>12</sup> then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother,<sup>13</sup> thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And many such things you do.”

<sup>iv</sup> **Matthew 23:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> They tie up heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on people’s shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to move them with their finger.

<sup>v</sup> **Mark 8:36-37 (KJV)**

<sup>36</sup> For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? <sup>37</sup> Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

<sup>vi</sup> **Revelation 2:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

<sup>vii</sup> **Numbers 32:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> But if you will not do so, behold, you have sinned against the LORD, and be sure your sin will find you out.

<sup>viii</sup> **Mark 12:29-31 (ESV)**

<sup>29</sup> Jesus answered, “The most important is, ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.’<sup>30</sup> And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’<sup>31</sup> The second is this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.”

<sup>ix</sup> **Mark 6:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in their belts—

<sup>x</sup> **Jeremiah 17:9 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

<sup>xi</sup> **Mark 1:40-42 (ESV)**

<sup>40</sup> And a leper came to him, imploring him, and kneeling said to him, “If you will, you can make me clean.”

<sup>41</sup> Moved with pity, he stretched out his hand and touched him and said to him, “I will; be clean.”<sup>42</sup> And immediately the leprosy left him, and he was made clean.

<sup>xii</sup> **Mark 2:10-12 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he said to the paralytic—<sup>11</sup> “I say to you, rise, pick up your bed, and go home.”<sup>12</sup> And he rose and immediately picked up his bed and went out before them all, so that they were all amazed and glorified God, saying, “We never saw anything like this!”

<sup>xiii</sup> **Mark 4:41 (ESV)**

<sup>41</sup> And they were filled with great fear and said to one another, “Who then is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?”

<sup>xiv</sup> **John 14:9-10 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? <sup>10</sup> Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority, but the Father who dwells in me does his works.

<sup>xv</sup> **Luke 6:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> And he said to them, “The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.”

<sup>xvi</sup> **Mark 6:8 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> He charged them to take nothing for their journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in their belts—

<sup>xvii</sup> **John 6:41-42 (ESV)**

<sup>41</sup> So the Jews grumbled about him, because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.”<sup>42</sup> They

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said, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven?’”

<sup>xviii</sup> **Mark 2:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> And Jesus said to them, “Can the wedding guests fast while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast.

<sup>xix</sup> **1 John 1:9-10 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

<sup>10</sup> If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

<sup>xx</sup> **Colossians 3:1 (NASB)**

<sup>1</sup> Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

<sup>xxi</sup> **Psalms 37:4 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> Delight yourself in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart.

<sup>xxii</sup> **Psalms 139:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there was none of them.

<sup>xxiii</sup> **Galatians 2:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

<sup>xxiv</sup> David Guzik, *Mark*, David Guzik’s Commentaries on the Bible (Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik, 2013), Mk 8:13–15.

<sup>xxv</sup> **Exodus 14:21 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and the LORD drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided.

<sup>xxvi</sup> **John 11:43-44 (ESV)**

<sup>43</sup> When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out.”

<sup>44</sup> The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, “Unbind him, and let him go.”

<sup>xxvii</sup> **Joshua 10:12-13 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> At that time Joshua spoke to the LORD in the day when the LORD gave the Amorites over to the sons of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, “Sun, stand still at Gibeon, and moon, in the Valley of Aijalon.”

<sup>13</sup> And the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, until the nation took vengeance on their enemies. Is this not written in the Book of Jashar? The sun stopped in the midst of heaven and did not hurry to set for about a whole day.

<sup>xxviii</sup> **Acts 5:18-20 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. <sup>19</sup> But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, <sup>20</sup> “Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life.”

<sup>xxix</sup> **Acts 16:25-26 (ESV)**

<sup>25</sup> About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them, <sup>26</sup> and suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken. And immediately all the doors were opened, and everyone’s bonds were unfastened.

<sup>xxx</sup> **Philippians 4:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

<sup>xxxi</sup> **1 Corinthians 3:22-23 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours,

<sup>23</sup> and you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.

<sup>xxxii</sup> **Psalms 23:1-2 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. <sup>2</sup> He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters.

<sup>xxxiii</sup> **Galatians 5:13 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.