

**Mark 8: 13-21, Matthew 16: 5-12, and Luke 12: 1-3; "The Leaven of the Pharisees", Sermon # 47 in the series - "Astonished at His Teaching", Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on August 30th, 2009, in the Morning Worship Service.**

The last time that we were together going through the gospel of Mark, we spoke about the evil of the Pharisees and the Sadducees asking for a sign from heaven. They were the two most significant religious parties in the nation of Israel, but what they believed about the Scriptures, and what they added from them or took away from them was all wrong. The Pharisees thought that they could add to the Word of God their traditions. And they had made up thousands of man-made rules and placed them above the Scriptures and thus put themselves, and others around them, in a terrible spiritual bondage. They believed that by their own religious observance of these traditions of the fathers, that they were pleasing to God. The Sadducees were the party that did not believe in things supernatural such as angels and spirits. They did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. Just the writings of the Scriptures were enough for them, but as Jesus said to them in Matthew 22: 41 they neither understood the Scriptures or the power of God. Both these groups were in great error about Jesus. They thought that since He did not submit to either of their group's teachings that he was a false prophet. They had been given all the signs that they needed to be given, in the miracles that Jesus was performing, and yet they still refused to believe in Him. And so Jesus would not give them another sign it says here in the gospel of Mark. He knew that they were testing Him in order that they could try Him, and prove Him to be a false prophet; which He was not. In Matthew it says that He did give them a true sign. He gave them the sign of His coming crucifixion on behalf of sinners, and how; even like Jonah, who was three days and 3 nights in the belly of the fish, that He would be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. It was a mighty sign of what He would do through His death and resurrection to secure the salvation of all those who would trust in Him. But most of the Sadducees and the Pharisees would not trust in Him. They had a false way of reasoning which led them to wrong conclusions about the Lord Jesus and His ministry, and wrong conclusions about how God was to be worshiped and served. It was because our Lord was so concerned about this, and the consequences which would come to His disciples if they thought and reasoned like the Pharisees and the Sadducees, that He probably didn't speak much on the trip back across the lake. But when they were almost to the other side, the disciples realized that in their haste to leave, they had forgotten to take bread with them. They were concerned about their having enough physical food to eat for this next part of their journey; and He was concerned about their having enough spiritual food that would feed their souls and give them eternal life. He was concerned about leaven in the bread of their spiritual lives; a leaven that could silently, but surely, permeate every aspect of their thinking so that they were turned away from the true and spiritual bread of life which He is.

Often, now, in our day and in our society, there is also bad spiritual leaven in the words and attitudes and actions of people around us. People all around us are perishing for lack of knowledge; even in many of our churches. You will hear someone say, "I left that church that I used to attend, because I was not being fed there." There was not the bread being served there in the preaching and teaching that would either give life or satisfy spiritual hunger, or make that person wise enough or strong enough to live the Christian life. Indeed, there may have been the leaven of sin and error in the teaching, which if the person had stayed there, they would have perished forever. You should know, that it is the great concern of the Living Lord Jesus Christ that you not perish in your sins. It is His great concern, in the preaching of His word, that you be saved and delivered from your sins, and that you learn to walk with Him in the way of holiness and truth. Have you found that good way? Have you found that Old Path? Or have you partaken of the bread; the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees? That is what we want to understand this morning? What is this leaven of the Pharisees; the leaven of the Sadducees, and the leaven of Herod which is being talked about in these texts? What is it that even true Christians need to beware of? I think that there are 3 answers to these questions. The first answer is that everyone, even a true Christian, is to beware of the leaven of hypocrisy. The 2nd answer is the everyone, even a true Christian is to beware of unbelief; that is, failing to take notice all that Christ has already done. And the 3rd answer is that everyone, even a true Christian is to beware of false doctrine. Let's open up our hearts to the teaching of the God's good word to us here this morning. Let us receive the warnings of future judgment if we do not repent, as well as the promises of God's salvation and blessing in Christ if we believe.

**1st of all - Everyone, and even Christians must beware of the leaven of hypocrisy.**

Turn over with me to the text in Luke 12: 1. "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." This episode in Luke may have taken place at a different time from the one recorded in Matthew and Mark. Back in Luke 11: 29 we do find the same context as the other passages (the context of a generation seeking for signs), but only in Luke's gospel is this passage on leaven prefaced with our Lord's giving many woes to the Pharisees when He went to dine at a Pharisee's house. The Pharisee saw, and he marveled, that Jesus had not first washed before dinner. It was then that the Lord leveled His spiritual charges. What were the characteristics of Pharisaical hypocrisy? They are given to us in verses 39-44 of Luke 11. "Now you Pharisees make the outside of the cup and dish clean, but your inward part is full of greed and wickedness." "Foolish ones!" "Did not He who made the outside make the inside also?" "But rather give alms of such things as you have; then indeed all things are clean to you." "But woe to you Pharisees!" "For you tithe mint and rue and all manner of herbs, and pass by justice and the love of God." "These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone." "Woe to you

Pharisees!" "For you love the best seats in the synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces." "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" "For you are like graves which are not seen, and the men who walk over them are not aware of them." So the characteristics of hypocrisy are these. They would clean up their act (only outwardly) and make themselves holy, only in terms related to the way that men would see them, but in their hearts there were many sins, deceptions, and self-deceptions. They would claim to be doing good works and giving alms, but they were doing it from some greedy motive that no one else could see except God. They were lovers of money more than of God. They were very scrupulous about tithing all the little seeds in their possession, but would not give their money to help the poor and needy. They were very scrupulous in little things, but would completely overlook God's justice and His love being shown to people around them. They loved to have best seats at the table, and to receive the great and respectable titles of Rabbi and teacher given to them, but this only fueled their pride of heart and mind that they were great and wise in their own eyes, when, really, they were neither in God's. Jesus says in verse 44 that they were like graves which are not seen, and when people walk over them, they are not aware of them. There is spiritual death and destruction which awaits all who deceived by this kind of hypocrisy and never repent of it. They will end up in hell. This was where the Pharisees of that day were headed. And Jesus knew it, and He, being able to see their hearts, knew that they were hypocrites.

But there is also a great spiritual danger that a Christian may fall into; living their life hypocritically before a holy, all-seeing God. They cannot lose their salvation because it all rests on their faith in the work of Jesus Christ. But they may actually backslide and come to have a greater concern for how they look in the eyes of men, than how they look in the eyes of God. They may actually think that it is enough that they are cleaning the outside of the cup, the outside of their life, rather than having their heart to be clean and right before God. Now, I am saying that that this is the very thing which can happen to any of us, here in our day. If we are not careful about looking at our heart and guarding our heart, we may self-righteously begin to act this way. How dishonoring to God, and how dangerous to the soul. Can a person who professes to be a Christian really end up in hell? If they are sincerely trusting in the Lord, they never can; but if they are only play-acting the part of a Christian before men, and not doing the will of God, then they are a hypocrite who will lose their soul. Yes, it is not only possible, but Jesus says in Matthew 7: 21, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven." What is the remedy, then, for a professed Christian who would not be a hypocrite like the Pharisees? It is to remember that there is a Judgment Day coming that will reveal all about us. It will reward faithfulness to God's word and it will punish all disobedience and pretend Christianity. I assure you, that you do not want to be "cut a portion with the hypocrites" in that day. Now is the time to realize that unless you repent of hypocrisy, that you will perish with the hypocrites. A Christian is one who is willing to learn, and indeed he is one who will attempt to learn day by day where He has

fallen short of keeping the commandments of God. He will think about whether he is serving God alone as his only God. He will think about whether he takes God's name in vain. He will think about whether He is loving God with all his heart. He will think about whether he is keeping the Sabbath day holy. He will think about whether he honors his father and mother. He will think about each and every moral commandment that comes to him from the Bible and ask himself, "Am I keeping it?" And where he is not presently willing to keep them, he will pray to be made willing and he will beg God to make him willing by granting him a day of His power to him.

When God undertakes to change him and turn him away from whatever hypocrisy is in his life, it shall most definitely be done by that person's exercising faith in Jesus Christ. All un-repentant of hypocrisy shall be revealed either in this life or at the Day of Judgment. That exposure is all in His holy hands. Verse 2 says, "For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known." "Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops." In other words, all of our hypocrisies, if we have them, will come out in the Day of Judgment, and perhaps even be exposed in this present life, whether we have covered them well at this time, or not. The person who would play games with the Lord Jesus; who wants to be saved from their sins and yet does not want Him as Lord to give them a straight and true heart will be condemned as a hypocrite and will be cast into hell. No matter how clever you have been to conceal your hypocrisy, it shall be revealed. The person who will have Jesus will be shown, either sooner or later, the truth of where his or her heart is deficient and they will repent. Their sins will be covered with the blood of Christ and purged away by His grace. But the true and sincere Christian heeds the warnings of the future judgment which is coming, and he acts to confess and forsake all hypocrisy that he finds in himself. He is not only concerned that his sins might be exposed before men; he is concerned that his sins are dishonoring to God. This one truth ought to so lay hold of our heart; that we would cry out to God that He would change us and make us consistent in godliness. How can God be honored by a hypocritical Christian? Let us determine by Christ's grace that we will confess and forsake our sins and that we will honor Him by the way that we live our lives. Those who are greedy need to become secretly generous; to learn to give; their right hand not knowing what their left hand is doing. Those who are secretly envious of others need to become secretly satisfied with Christ and what God has given to them and shown to them. Those who are secretly full of malice and hatred need to become secretly and openly tender-hearted and loving towards those whom they feel that they have something against. Those who are secretly sensual and lecherous need to become those who have clean hearts, and become those who will clothe the naked in their heart and mind rather than looking to see or expose the nakedness of others.

It is only the grace of Christ that can give this kind of heart that will have these kinds of dealings with God. It is the truth which that wonderful saint, King David prayed for after his sin with Bathsheba. "Behold, You (O God) desire truth in the

inward parts, and in the hidden part You will make me to know wisdom." "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me." (Psalm 51, verses 6 and 10) Thank God that He is faithful and will not allow the true Christian to go on and on deceiving himself about the truth of his own heart's inconsistencies. Our Christ is faithful to reveal them to us; to show us the real problems of sin within our hearts; that we may cry to Him in prayer, for Him to come to our souls to give us grace to overcome them and live life with a single mind and a single heart. "Unite my heart to fear Thy name!", it says in Psalm 86: 11. The real question for the Christian is, "Am I consistent with what I profess to be?" "Am I in consistency trying to follow my Master, the Lord Jesus Christ?" "Do I really love His commandments?" "And do I really try to keep all of them in my heart?" Do I really mourn over those sins; those wanderings and straying into sin that really has been taking place in my heart, or do I try to pretend that I am really much more holy than I am? Do I confess these heart sins to God who has seen me and is grieved over me? Do I pray to forsake these secret sins and ask to have real fellowship with God in righteousness? Do I pray frequently asking for God's help? Do I weep and mourn over myself in secret when I realize that I am inconsistent in godliness? Do I cry out to God and to Christ to give me that precious grace to be consistent? Or, do I rationalize away my heart disobediences to God, as I think of myself within my heart? If I do rationalize them I should remember that God knows all about it, and I will be exposed on the Day of Judgment and perhaps even in the this present life in the time and place and way of His choosing. Therefore fear the Lord, and turn from all of your sins, and all hypocrisy that you find in yourself! Pray the prayer of David in Psalm 19, verse 12 - "Who can understand his errors?" "Cleanse me from secret faults." "Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me." "Then I shall be blameless, and I shall be innocent of great transgression." That is the first thing that we are to beware of; we are to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy.

**The 2nd thing that every man, even the Christian needs to beware of; is the leaven of unbelief or failing to take notice of what Christ has already done**

We find this truth being related for us in Mark Chapter 8, verses 14 and following. "Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, and they did not have more than one loaf with them in the boat." "Then He charged them, saying, "Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." Now, we must ask ourselves, why does Jesus drag king Herod into this warning that He gives His disciples here? I believe that it was because Herod had this same kind of leaven of trying to get Jesus to prove something to him arbitrarily. This was the same leaven as the Pharisees. This is speaking of how Pilate and Herod became friends on the day of Christ's examination before Pilate. If you turn to Luke Chapter 23 with me, you will see how that leaven evidenced itself in Herod's life. In verse 6 it says, "When Pilate heard of Galilee, he asked if the Man (that is Jesus) were a Galilean." "And as soon as he knew that He belonged to Herod's jurisdiction, he sent Him to Herod,

who was also in Jerusalem at that time." "Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad; for he had desired for a long time to see Him, because he had heard many things about Him, and he hoped to see some miracle done by Him." "Then he questioned Him with many words, but He answered him nothing." The reason that Jesus answered him nothing was because he was wanting to see a miracle done just to be impressed by it, not because he really had any true spiritual interest in Jesus or salvation, or entering into the kingdom of heaven. You will recall that a few years earlier Herod was the king who had enjoyed listening to John the Baptist preach, and yet at the same time that he hated him. Mark's gospel, chapter 6, verse 20 says, "Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just and holy man, and he protected him." "And when he heard him, he did many things and he heard him gladly." Then if we look over at Matthew's gospel, Chapter 14, verse 4 it says that when John had said to him, 'It is not lawful for you to take your brother Philip's wife to be your wife', then it says in verse 5, "And although he wanted to put him to death, he feared the multitude, because they counted him as a prophet." And then you will remember how the opportune day came when he saw Herodias' daughter dance and he was so pleased with it that he swore and promised her up to half his kingdom; that she could ask for whatever she wanted. And you know what she asked for. She asked for the head of John the Baptist. This is none other than the leaven that Jesus warns against. It is the leaven of wanting to see signs when there is no interest in knowing God, serving Him, or being obedient to Him. There is no faith in him; only curiosity about spiritual things that would not profit; things that will not save his soul. It was the same bad leaven that had permeated the Pharisees hearts, that also permeated Herod's heart; that when confronted with the sinfulness of his own heart; Herod, even though he might have wanted to reform his life in certain ways, would coldly and deliberately choose to have John killed so that he could fulfill a sinful vow and save face in front of his dinner guests. Even though shown God's power to reveal his sins; even though shown God's power to confront him over them; his stubborn unbelieving heart refused to yield. It is the leaven of a stubborn, unbelieving heart which would not take notice of, or remember the great things that God had already done shown them by His power. This same kind of leaven can be very dangerous to Christians because it leads to little faith in them. It can even lead to hardness of heart in a Christian. Notice Jesus' words in verse 17. "Why do you reason because you have no bread?" "Do you not yet perceive nor understand?" "Is your heart still hardened?" Jesus is reproofing the leaven of unbelief; a refusal to consider Christ as the greatest of God's gifts; Christ whose grace could change your heart forever, and forgive all of your sins. Christ who could meet all of your needs and satisfy your soul with good things every day of your life. Hebrews Chapter 3, verse 12 says, "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." "For we become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end."

As a true Christian you need to beware of the leaven of the unbelief of Herod and the Pharisees creeping into your life. You need to beware of allowing the grace of faith to grow low and to grow small in your heart. When you think about all of your physical and spiritual needs; your heart may grow dull and lifeless in prayer. Eventually you may actually become hardened to what the Lord Jesus has already done for you. Be careful that you do not take too much for granted. Take care that you do not forget His mighty works, but that you will remember, at critical times, the great things that He has done for you before. Magnify the great things that He has done for you in your heart and life already. Remember the disciples on that day coming back across the lake. They had forgotten to take bread. They were more concerned with their not having enough bread, when Jesus would have them to be more concerned about the strength of their faith in Him. It was doing the will of God that Jesus was always thinking about. He was always for putting first things first. "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod," He says to them. They think that is was because they brought no physical bread for the trip. "Why do you reason because you do not have bread?", Jesus says. "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, '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.'" "So He said to them, 'How is it that you do not understand?" Sometimes Christians don't understand. They don't see the connection between the mighty works of Christ in the past and His ability in the present to help them. Beware of this! You who believe have eyes to see spiritually. You should grasp and lay hold of the connection between the strength of your faith and the great things that Christ has done for you in the past, unless you are letting your heart grow cold and hard through the leaven of unbelief. Faith is a grace which must be exercised or it will grow smaller. Faith is not a mere assent to the power and grace of Jesus. It is a living grace in the soul which grows weak if it does not feed on the promises of God and the mighty deeds which Christ has already done on the cross, in His resurrection, and in the lives of His saints all down through history. Stir yourself up, I say, to remember, and to consider all that Christ has done and all that He will do, even if you have only one loaf of bread.

**And then 3rdly - Everyone, even a true Christian is to beware of the leaven of false doctrine and teaching.**

I take this from Matthew 16: 12 where it says, "Then they understood that He did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and the Sadducees." The doctrine of the Pharisees was one of a strict conformity, not only to the moral and ceremonial law, but also to the traditions which legalistic rabbis had added to it. They were men who were trying to be justified by law. This teaching is a form of bad leaven. And you and I who are Christians must take a decided stand against it. Turn with me to Galatians Chapter 5, verse 1. "Stand fast

therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage." Indeed I, Paul, say to you that if you become circumcised, Christ will profit you nothing." "And I testify again to every man who becomes circumcised that he is a debtor to keep the whole law." "You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace." "For we through the Spirit eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness by faith." "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love." "You ran well." "Who hindered you from obeying the truth?" "This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you." "A little leaven leavens the whole lump." You can see why a Christian needs to beware of this leaven; this false doctrine and teaching of the Pharisees. Christ has not called us to bondage to the law of God, either the ceremonial or the moral law. He has called us to freedom. Our keeping the commandments of God is done by faith in Jesus Christ, working itself out in love for people around us; both Christian and non-Christian. The person who claims that he is a true Christian should not be bound to the teaching that sacraments and ceremonies save anyone from their sins. They will not. But faith in Christ alone will. We are not debtors to keep the whole law. We are debtors to Christ who kept it for us; who kept it perfectly. And it is because He has shown us this saving love and amazing grace, that we will serve him from the position that His grace justifies us; His grace declares us righteous in God's sight. And we do not need to be circumcised, baptized as an infant, take the mass, or keep all the commandments of God from the standpoint that we can merit any favor of God for doing so. Christ has done that for us, and we will keep God's commandments trusting in that and not put ourselves in bondage under the law. Do not let any of the bad leaven in.

The doctrine of the Sadducees was the doctrine of not believing in the supernatural; not believing in the resurrection of the dead, not believing that the power of God was absolutely necessary to live a life pleasing to God. But this is why so many people make up their own Christianity and then eventually allow sinners of all types to come and roost under the banner of the true Church. Many modern day Sadducees believe that homosexuals, adulterers, and fornicators should be permitted not only in the membership of the church, but also into the ministry itself. This is their openly avowed teaching. But the Apostle Paul had words for such. He called such teaching leaven. When speaking to the Corinthian Church about their boasted acceptance of a man who was sleeping with his father's wife, he said to them, "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 the old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." Let us determine brethren that we will do the same. Let us not allow the leaven of the false teaching of legalism or license to enter our midst. Let us purge out all leaven of hypocrisy,

unbelief, and false teaching. Let us receive the warning of the One who died for us; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.