

Slow Learning

Mark 8:11-21

Wonderful to sing these songs of God's work, what He has done and how He has not only created all things (and we are recipients of that, being ourselves created by Him but enjoying His creation as we live in this world), but also singing about God's amazing works and saving us, sending His Son as we just sang about, sending His Son to die on the cross for us - the way that He loved us. We get to sing about these works of God, these beautiful acts that God has done, He has taken to bless us as we live for Him and for His glory.

In addition to that, we have His Word, and that's what we get to turn to now, the time to pay attention to His Word, what He has said to us, what He's communicated that we might respond accordingly. And that is kind of how our worship services tend to go; we have a time of reflecting on the work of God and reflecting on the Word of God. The work of God we sing about, declare, and then we look at the Word of God, as we study it and attempt to understand it by the help of His Spirit and live it out as we go from this place. And you think of those things and immediately the thoughts that come to mind are joy, just overwhelmed with the privilege this is, the opportunity that we have before us; that we are free to do this and gather together and enjoy this, but we do have the facility for this, and we do have the people that have this in common that we come together as a church to do this. And all these things are just privileges one after another of the joy that we have to sing of God's works and to reflect on His Word.

But I want to emphasize another aspect of this, this morning, and that is not just that it's a privilege, but there's an obligation here. There's a burden. There's a responsibility that comes with this time. There's something heavy that comes with an interaction with the Word of God, and that is there must be a response. If there is no response, then we run a risk, a very serious risk, a risk of offending God, a risk of putting ourselves in this place where we have no faith. And then, we really become just like the generation of Israelites that got to see God's amazing works in bringing them out of Egypt, and they responded without faith to the Word of God. They heard God's Word. They heard Moses speaking, but they did not respond. They were a faithless generation. The author of Hebrews puts it this way in

Hebrews 3:7-11, “Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says, ‘Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion, on the day of testing in the wilderness, where your fathers put me to the test and saw my works for forty years. Therefore I was provoked with that generation, and said, ‘They always go astray in their heart; they have not known my ways.’ As I swore in my wrath, ‘They shall not enter my rest.’ ”

There’s a risk this morning. There’s a risk every time we encounter the Word of God. There’s a risk involved, and it’s hinged upon whether or not you and I respond, whether or not we actually respond to this teaching from God. On the one hand, we can respond in faith, and we’ll be changed from glory to glory to look more like His Son, or we cannot respond. You can continue to sit through it, be comfortable, and have no reaction, have no change. And what do we become like? ...these Israelites, these Israelites that wandered for forty years complaining, grumbling, not responding to God and receiving the punishment they deserved - abandonment by God. He rejected them, and as God swore in His wrath, “They shall not enter my rest.” And you think, wow, that’s a certain way to kind of start a message. Yeah, talk about the risk involved and the heavy nature of this, and rather than emphasize the love of God towards us and His grace and mercy; and those things are equally true. We understand God’s grace, His mercy, His kindness towards us, but at the same time, there’s a weight to this. There’s a necessity that comes with looking at the Word of God; that is, that it impacts us. It changes us. It does something. And this same weightiness is seen in the life of Christ.

As we return to Mark 8 this morning, we’re going to look at Mark 8:11-21, and see a very similar situation. Just like with the ancient Israelites and how they rebelled over forty years, we now have another example of people that did not receive and did not respond appropriately to God. Let’s look at our text this morning, and we’ll read Mark 8:11-21, starting in verse 11; “The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him. And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, ‘Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation.’ And he left them, got into the boat again, and went to the other side. Now they had forgotten to bring bread, and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. And he cautioned them, saying, ‘Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.’ And they began discussing with one another the fact that they had no bread. 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? 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 broken pieces did you take up?’ They said to him, ‘Twelve.’ ‘And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?’ And they said to him, ‘Seven.’ And he said to them, ‘Do you not yet understand?’ ”

This passage that we come to today is a shift. It’s really a change in scene, a change in audience, a full-on change compared to what we’ve been examining. The last three times we’ve been in Mark, you remember, really starting in Mark 7:24, we had Jesus go on this kind of tour with His disciples. He spent some time with His disciples, and He went out of Israel’s territory, Israel’s boundaries, and He went into Gentile... right? ...non-Jewish territory. And they went all the way up north. They went to Tyre and Sidon, and that’s where He interacted with this Syrophoenician woman, and then in verse 31, we saw them leave that place and go to the Decapolis, the ten cities under Roman rule. Once again, not Jewish... right? ...unlike Jesus and His disciples who were Jewish. He was taking them through these cities and these regions that were Gentile, not Jewish people, and in this, the disciples got to see probably a lot more than what we have recorded here in Mark, but at least what we have here in Mark shows us how Jesus interacted with non-Jewish people. How did Jesus interact with the world? How did Jesus interact with those who weren’t His descent, with Gentiles? And this is what we saw.

We saw His compassion, and that ultimately culminated and kind of climaxed in what we saw last time with Him being willing to feed the thousands. It says, “And there were about four thousand people.” More than likely, sixteen thousand because of women and children in addition to that number. In the same way that Jesus fed the five thousand, the Jewish people, so too, He had compassion on this Gentile crowd in the Decapolis in Mark 8:1-10; and He fed them as well, showing His disciples, look, it does not matter. It’s the same message that you take to all people; and that would be instrumental for the disciples as they become the ones to build up the church in the book of Acts. That’s where we’ve been.

And now, we see a shift. It really begins in verse 10, the end of where we left off, one verse before where we started today; “And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.” ... “...the district of Dalmanutha.” And this is where we see them leaving that Gentile territory, and as we’ve seen already in what we’ve read today, they are now back in Jewish territory, back in the Jewish part of Galilee, surrounding the Sea of Galilee. And the text really divides into two parts today. The first smaller half is the interaction with the Pharisees, and the second half is Jesus interacting with His disciples.

So, let’s look at the first part here, verses 11-13. We see Jesus’ interaction with these skeptical Pharisees - these skeptical Pharisees, and you recall, we’ve talked about these Pharisees before. We’ve seen them before. Occasionally they’ve come up, and every time they’ve come up in this gospel account, as they are the Jewish leaders, as they are the ones who knew the Word so well and knew the Old Testament, and they were the ones who led the people, you would think they would be the most aware, the most ready to receive a Messiah for the Jewish people, and yet we’ve seen time and time again, every time they’ve interacted with Jesus, it’s been going toe to toe. It’s been aggressive, antagonistic, in opposition - and that’s what we see, even more so in our text right here.

That starts off just simply in verse 11 with the demand - the demand of how it begins. Jesus’s disciples have been off. They’ve been going through Gentile territory, and now, here they are going back across the sea into Jewish territory again, and what do we find in verse 11? “The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him.” Just so we understand that this is no longer Gentile territory, you have the Decapolis, that region that would be Gentile, as referring to that which is on the eastern and southern side of the Sea of Galilee. That’s where they came from. That’s where Jesus just fed the four thousand. Now, they go across, and they go to (as our text said in verse 10) Dalmanutha, and when you look at history, you kind of look up the record of Dalmanutha, and you find nothing. We don’t know anything about Dalmanutha or where it was, but we have Matthew’s account as another way to compare, and he parallels, and he actually uses the city titled of Magadan or Magdala and so we look at that, and we actually have a reference point that is over there on the northwest shore of the Sea of Galilee, and it’s back in Jewish territory. It’s

close to Capernaum where Jesus has done so much of what we've already seen in Mark's gospel. This is where He is now.

What is He greeted by? ...not a welcoming crowd, not excitement. Alright? Instead, Pharisees who have evil intent. It's impossible to miss. This is completely wicked, completely evil, what the Pharisees bring. "The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign..." And why? "...to test him." All this is bad. This is not a happy, pleasant greeting. This is, once again, just more opposition, more of this antagonistic desire coming from these Pharisees. This word arguing, really, just meaning questioning in the form of dispute. There's a dispute that they have to bring to Jesus. They're seeking a sign. They want a sign, and you just have to chuckle when you see stuff like this, and you go, really, a sign? Huh, yeah, that is a good thing to ask. Yeah, we really haven't seen that from Jesus. Come on, give us a sign. And you think about, what has Jesus been doing? There's just been so many signs just in Mark's gospel, and he's the smallest one, and then you go to John's gospel, and John's says there's just way more than we could record. He did far more than what we wrote down. So, if we think of these things, we realize Jesus is constantly doing signs, and the Pharisees saw it for themselves. They heard plenty reports from other people. They were fully aware of Jesus and the legitimacy of doing these signs. In fact, they already came to their own conclusion.

You remember Mark 3 when they came, this delegation comes to investigate and observe Jesus and see what to conclude about His ministry, and their conclusion is that terrible statement, that terrible understanding; they think Jesus is working with Satan. Jesus is on Satan's team; that's why He's got this power - that's why He's able to cast out demons - that's why He's doing these miraculous things. That was their conclusion already, but here they are demanding a sign from heaven, something new, something better than what they've seen before. Yeah, okay, you healed crippled people. You healed the lame. Yeah, you give sight to the blind. Big whoop. Give us something we haven't seen. Right? Walking on water - you know, feeding people - eh, really? We want something big. Right? ...something totally new. Just out the gate that's ridiculous. Who are they? They're not doing signs themselves. Who are they to not be amazed at this ministry of Christ? But nonetheless, here they are challenging Him. And our text says, "...a sign from heaven..." It's very possible that this is literally what they're asking for. Do something that involves the stars, like astronomy, you know, that does something with

the sky, that just amazes us, and that'll really indicate that you're from God; then we'll know.

It's never enough for them. They're constantly raising the bar. They want something greater, something better, for Jesus to do. And the intent is pretty clear as our text says in verse 11. Why? "...to test him." They're testing Jesus; the same word that you see also in Scripture for tempting. They're literally tempting Him. It's not a nice little test to see if He's pass/fail. It's a temptation. Alright? It's a desire to try and trip Him up. They want Him to fall. I mean, it's just like back in chapter 3 when they plant that man in the synagogue that has the withered hand, and they say, okay, we'll put this man here. It's the Sabbath, a day of rest. We'll see if Jesus actually heals this man, and if He does, then we'll say, aha! You're working. You should not have been doing that. It's all scheming. It all just shows part of their, their heart, their perspective, their attitude, toward Jesus - no endorsement. Alright? ...no love at all in any portion. Even at a minimum, they should be able to recognize Jesus as a prophet. At a minimum, they should be able to say this guy's from God. We don't know exactly who He is, but we know He's from God. But they can't even get that straight, and so, they're led into this trying to trip Him up, trying to test Him, trying to put Him in a dilemma of some sort. They figure, well, surely if He takes us up on this, you know, there's no way He's going to do something from the heavens. He can't do that so He'll look like a fool if He tries. Or, He can decline, and then we'll win because He didn't listen to us. This is their scheming. This is their desire, wanting Jesus to perform so they can emerge victorious and back on top and the leaders of the people and getting all the popularity and attention that Jesus had been taking from them. It's amazing, amazing, how these Pharisees got to this point.

You just have to ask yourself, how hard is their heart that they're at this point? How cold did they get that they're here demanding this from Jesus, demanding, arguing, testing the Messiah the Son of God - hard hearts, plenty of God's works in front of them, plenty of Jesus doing these supernatural evidences, and yet they ignore it completely - plenty of teaching, plenty of revelation of the Word of God. They themselves as Pharisees and scribes knew the Word better than everyone else, and then they were hearing Jesus teach it even more. They had full exposure. They didn't need more information. They didn't need more knowledge. They had plenty of it, but

what did they do with all of it? ...ignored it completely - neglected it. And what did Jesus do?

How would Jesus respond to this? We've already seen in verses 12-13, He dismisses them - this dismissal - dismissal in verses 12-13; "And he sighed deeply in his spirit and said, 'Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly, I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation.' And he left them, got into the boat again, and went to the other side." He dismisses this. He rejects them, completely. This deep sigh, we've seen Him do it before at the end of chapter 7 when He encountered the deaf and mute man. And that was different. That was a sigh of being burdened with compassion for this man. He was showing this man that couldn't hear. He was showing him this visual display of His compassion for the man and praying to God and groaning, and showing this man that He was healing him with the power of God. This is not that. This is not that sigh of compassion again; this is a sigh of being burdened by the people and specifically by the Jewish leaders. Again? You want to come at Me, again? You want to do this, again? We've had our share of interactions, and opposition, and here you are again? Sigh! Really, you want to do this? This is what they're here to do, to challenge Jesus once again.

Look at how He addresses them; "Why does this generation seek a sign?" This kind of phraseology, this way of how it's formed here, "...this generation...", it's really Jesus kind of using the same terminology of how God referred to the ancient Israelites. When God spoke to the Israelites through the prophets, over and over again when they were rebellious, He would say this generation is perverse. This generation is wicked and sinful. They don't respond in faith. Deuteronomy 32:20; "And he said, 'I will hide my face from them; I will see what their end will be, for they are a perverse generation, children in whom is no faithfulness.'" Jesus is using this same terminology for the Pharisees. This generation seeks a sign? This generation is wicked, sinful. They don't get it. He goes on to say, "Truly, I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation." Literally, I mean, this is one of those instances where we have our English version, but it would be so much greater if we could go back and hear it and read it from Mark himself and what he wrote in Greek because it literally kind of reads, "Truly I say to you if a sign will be given to this generation..." ...just ends. It kind of trails off and, really, what it is it's this oath formula. It's kind of like Jesus is swearing

at this, going, I swear an oath; if a sign is given to this generation then I must perish. That's how certain Jesus was not giving them a sign.

It's basically saying, so help Me if a sign comes your way, you're not getting one. You are not getting a sign. It's not happening. It just solidifies Jesus' rejection of these people. And it's true - you look at the rest of Mark and Jesus does not interact with these people again until He goes to His death on the cross, until He comes down into Jerusalem and travels there for Passover, for the intent of offering Himself on the cross, then He will interact with them once again in front of all the people and have to continue to teach and show His authority over them and the Scriptures, but this is it. This is the last interaction He has with them in Galilee. This is the last public interaction He has in His ministry until He goes to Jerusalem. He's done with the Pharisees. He's done with them. No more. You think, wow, this sounds really harsh because we praise the God of grace, and we talk about the love of Jesus and amen because that's true. But how does God respond to people after they have been so faithless time and time again, after people have been so exposed to God's works and His Word just like these Pharisees? These Pharisees are just like the ancient Israelites. They saw the amazing works of God, just as they saw it in the past through the plagues on Egypt. So now were these Pharisees seeing the miracles of Jesus, just as they heard the thundering on Sinai and the deliverance of the Ten Commandments and the Law through Moses, the Word of God. So too, these Pharisees had God's Word memorized, meditating on it; and yet what's their response? ...faithless, testing God, arguing with Him. They are passed the point of no return.

Jesus is done with them. He's forsaken these Pharisees. He's abandoned them, and you think, can God do that? Does this happen? Can God abandon people? Well, let me ask you this, do people still ignore God's works today? You bet they do. You think of Romans 1, and what did Paul teach there? All of God's glory has been revealed in Creation. His handiwork is all over. There's no question. In fact, it's so evident that man is without excuse. No man on this planet can give an excuse for not noticing or observing the amazing glory of God in Creation. It's evident - the work of God, everywhere - so abundant. But what happens? Paul reveals in Romans 1 there's people that, despite all that, they still respond in sin. They dishonor God. They don't give Him the honor He deserves, and they're not thankful for it. They're ungrateful, and they dishonor God. So, what happens? Paul

doesn't say so God just gives more grace, and He just keeps trying, and He keeps knocking, and He keeps hoping? No! God pours out His wrath on those people, those people that have rejected His work over and over again, Paul says (1 Thessalonians 2:16), "But [the] wrath [of God] has come upon them..." How so? ...to let them go into their sin. God's wrath has come by saying fine, have it. You want your sin? Go for it, and He just let's mankind go. People still ignore the work of God, and in doing so, they've been abandoned by God.

What about the Word of God? Do people ignore the Word of God? This one hits a little closer to home because it's easier for us to think, yeah, that's right, that world is so sinful and wicked, they do ignore God. His work is so obvious. Shame on them. They're sinful. What about the Word of God? The Word of God that you have, that we study right now, that we pay attention to, do people ignore that? You bet. Case in point, the Pharisees, right here in our text, knowing the Word potentially better than a lot of us in this room. Their knowledge was so high, but it did not equate to saving faith. It did not measure up to a relationship with God. Be careful that you're not too quick to think that your knowledge gives you this saving faith. You see, really, if you have true saving faith, the knowledge that comes from the Word of God, and you respond in faith, and that will show itself. You will be a doer of the Word. You will live it out. You will not respond with this skepticism to God, and you will not be dissatisfied with what He's doing, and you'll not approach Him and say I've got a better plan actually. I know what you said, but I've got a different direction that this could go. No, that won't be your response. You will continue to humble yourself under the Word of God. Listen to what it says, and do it. It'll make the impact in your life. It'll change you. You will not be the same. You will be transformed as opposed to these Pharisees who continued to come back with a hard heart, challenging God in the form of Christ. Jesus has abandoned these people. Verse 13 states, "And he left them, got into the boat again, and went to the other side." That's it. No more interactions here; it's done. If I come over here just for you guys to ask for another sign, so help Me, I'm done with you, and He leaves. He goes "...to the other side."

This is where we see Him, once again starting from what we saw in the beginning of chapter 8, in the Gentile region of the Decapolis, feeding the thousands, then coming for this brief stop that we've just seen. It was short. It was this encounter with the Pharisees where Jesus said I'm done with you,

and now going back to the other side. This isn't back to the other side as in Gentile territory. This would be back more on the north side which is still in Jewish territory. And what we see in our text is really not even them getting to the location yet. What we have in the rest of the text, verses 14-21, is the boat ride. So, we see a conversation on the boat ride, and we see these slow disciples. How will the disciples respond? We've seen the truth displayed once again, that God can and He does abandon people based on their failure to respond to His works and His Word.

How about the disciples? What will they do? Verses 14-21, once again; "Now they had forgotten to bring bread, and they had only one loaf with them in the boat. And he cautioned them, saying, 'Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.'" And they began discussing with one another the fact that they had no bread. 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? 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 broken pieces did you take up?' They said to him, 'Twelve.' 'And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?' And they said to him, 'Seven.' And he said to them, 'Do you not yet understand?'"

This boat ride, really, after a little background in verse 14, it really begins with this caution that comes from Jesus. That's what we find in verse 15 here, a caution, the warning that we get from Jesus in verse 15. It's simple; "Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod," as we read in verse 15. Jesus has just had this encounter with the Pharisees. It's coming off of that that He says this warning. Right? He just had this encounter with the Pharisees where He told them He's done because of their desire and attitude toward Him, and now He's in the boat, and He's got this chance to debrief with the disciples once again. And we get a little glimpse into how Jesus interacted with His disciples. We see it from time to time, and so here's this kind of intimate moment. They're in the boat, and after this interaction with the Pharisees, Jesus now tells His disciples, "Watch out; beware of the leaven of..." those guys. "...beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." He's warning about those same Pharisees He just interacted with.

And His whole warning is centered on this illustration of leaven. And we think, why leaven? Why would you pick that? "...the leaven of the Pharisees..." Why that metaphor? Why that illustration? Well, He's been interacting with bread a lot, and He's been feeding people and giving bread out. And Mark tells us, as they got into the boat, "Now they had forgotten to bring bread, and they had only one loaf with them in the boat." So, kind of hanging on that, Jesus uses that illustration; "...beware of the leaven of..." these guys. "... beware of the..." yeast of these guys. In what sense? Why leaven? What did leaven do? You put leaven into a batch of dough and what do you have? The dough rises. The bread rises, and it becomes a totally different kind of fluffy bread as opposed to the flat bread that they had, the matzah that they would eat, and so this difference here. The leaven functions, in a way, to permeate all the bread. It goes throughout the whole. It spreads. And most of the time that this illustration is used in the Bible, it's negative. It's not a good thing. In fact, Paul in 1 Corinthians 5, he warns the church. He warns you and I, and says be careful about sin because if sin is not dealt with, if a church just tolerates sin and lets sin just kind of go for a time and don't do anything about it, then it's going to spread. It's like leaven. It spreads throughout the whole church. It'll permeate if you don't deal with it, and you don't cut it off. And so here Jesus's doing a similar thing; "Watch out; beware of the leaven of..." these guys. It spreads. It will. It does. It'll spread to people. It'll spread to the Jewish nation. It'll spread to you too, if you're not careful.

So, then we ask the next obvious question; well, then what's the leaven? What is "...the leaven of the Pharisees..."? Tell us what it is so that we don't kind of fall into it, so we don't get affected by it, impacted by it. In this account, we really don't have the details given, but we have parallel accounts where we get a little more information, and the interpretation is almost different depending on who the gospel writer is. According to Matthew, 16:12, in his parallel account, he says, "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." So, watch out for the teaching that these men bring. Watch out for the teaching of the Pharisees. It will spread. It will permeate the nation. Or in Luke, he highlights the living, not just the teaching, but the living; "...beware of the leaven of the Pharisees..." It's hypocrisy. It's this hypocritical living, and they do it so well. So, what's everyone else going to do? They follow in suit, and they, too, will follow as hypocrites.

So, what about Mark? What's Mark highlighting? Is he highlighting one of those, particularly? I think the best way to understanding it is just to understand leaven in light of verses 11-13, what we just read. What did we see? We saw faithless people. We saw faithless Pharisees. We saw people that were not satisfied with Jesus. They just wanted more. It wasn't enough. It never was enough. They kept wanting more because they had no faith. It was unbelief is really what it is, and Jesus says beware of that unbelief, that attitude of unbelief, that faithless approach to life and to Me the Messiah and to God, that spreads. That will. Their unbelief will spread, and if you disciples aren't careful, it'll come to you, too. It's unbelief, a leaven of faithless attitude, a leaven of unbelief, that the Pharisees had exercised. It's their refusal of Jesus. Herod did the same thing. He warns also about Herod here. Right? "...the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." Herod did the same thing when he heard of Jesus and the news of Jesus. As the disciples went out, and they preached about Jesus, he said, umm, this is John the Baptist back from the dead. He wasn't willing to identify it as Jesus the Messiah, and so, too, here the Pharisees, at one point, calling Jesus a worker with Satan, and at this point here in our text, demanding more signs from Him. It's unbelief.

So, Jesus issues this warning. After the disciples seeing at first hand the unbelief of the Pharisees and Jesus giving up on them, He then says watch out for that, that that doesn't happen to you too. How do they respond? We see their main concern shows up in verses 14-16, and, as we find out, it doesn't quite line up with Jesus' warning. They don't really get it. They're slow, slow in their learning, slow in their understanding, as we've seen throughout the gospel up to this point, and it kind of gets epitomized here. Mark reminds us in verse 14 - he kind of sets the scene; "...they had forgotten to bring bread..." (good one) "...and they had only one loaf with them in the boat." That's not really enough for thirteen people. And then, Jesus issued that warning in verse 15; "Watch out..." Then verse 16; "And they began discussing with one another the fact that they had no bread." What? Does that have anything to do with unbelief? Does that have anything to do with the teaching, the living, of the Pharisees? Not at all. They're back to talking about bread. They're clearly low on their food supply; we get that. But even after Jesus issues this warning, they completely miss it. They don't understand the warning. In fact, it's very possible that they're thinking, okay, so when we get to the other side, and we go to buy some bread, we

just make sure we won't buy any bread from the Pharisees because He's saying watch out for their leaven in bread. Okay, got it. Okay, we'll stay far away from their bread. It must be contaminated. We don't want to die, that kind of thing. Okay. Thanks Jesus. So, back to the bread we have here in the boat.

No. They miss it. They're completely off. They're thinking only about the physical food supply that they have. This is their slow learning in action. This is their inability to fully understand what Jesus is talking about; and in a way, it's just very ironic because their anxiety, their worrying about food, their inability to understand how little food they have, but also the chef they have in the boat with them, Jesus the Messiah, they still can't put it together. And because of their worry, it really seems like they're going down the same path as the Pharisees. They're on the same route. They're on the same journey, a lack of faith even in the midst of what they've seen. Even in the midst of what they're experienced with Jesus, they still can't put it together. And it's for this point that Jesus has to clarify. And He really gives really one of the strongest rebukes you find Jesus giving to His disciples. It's forceful, and it comes with these questions that He gives in verses 17-21. And this is the confrontation that He gives - the confrontation that He gives to His disciples. They need to get this. He has this moment with them in the boat, and they need to understand. And He's not going to let them continue to go in their lack of understanding and their slow learning. He has to confront this. He has to deal with this, and He does so with these questions that come.

You'll notice it's just one question after another after another after another, and it's an effective technique. This is kind of how it can happen sometimes when you are plagued with questions from someone, and it really does start to kind of work on you, and that's what Jesus is doing with His disciples here, starting with the very first one, "Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread?" What are you doing? Did you not listen to Me at all? Did you not hear a thing I just said? How long have you been with Me? Have you seen some of the stuff I've done? Why are you talking about bread? What are you doing talking about bread? These questions just come, and it's like a vise that's just kind of like increasing the pressure on these disciples as they sit there and take it from Jesus. You're missing the point completely Jesus has to say, and He goes on to say these questions. "Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Having eyes do

you not see, and having ears do you not hear?” Just the imagery of that question sounds like, wow, that’s pretty messed up. Of course, I’ve got ears. Of course, I can hear. Yeah, I’ve got eyes. I can see. I know what’s happening. So, you think, already that’s a very strong rebuke in that question, but it’s even stronger based on what these disciples knew of God’s interaction with Israel. They would be aware of how the prophets interacted with Israel and the nation.

Time and time again, when God was dealing with rebellious, wicked Israel, when He confronted His own people, how did He do it? ...these exact same questions through Jeremiah, through Ezekiel, through Isaiah. How are you people, having eyes but you can’t see a thing? You have ears, but you don’t understand. You don’t hear. You don’t get it. Instead, you hear the Word of God, and off you go, right back into your idolatry, off you go, right back into your sin. It’s amazing, an amazing phenomenon that you have ears but you don’t use them. This is how God confronted His people, and now this is how Jesus is confronting His disciples in the boat. Imagine the sting that this would have. I mean, this is a rebuke that would land hard upon them even more so. This is something He’s already said, really, in His ministry. If you just go back to Mark 4, you recall that was the time when Jesus kind of changed up His teaching strategy. He stopped teaching, like, openly and plainly and kind of simply for all to understand, and He started using parables, and so the question was, well, why? Why did He do that? Why did He start using parables? And the idea was to try and hide the message from the unbelievers, hide the message from those that were only following Him for enthusiasm’s sake, or hide the message from those that thought He was working with Satan, like the Pharisees; and to reveal the message to those that were truly following, that didn’t know much, but they were trying, and these parables would open their eyes to see more about the kingdom. And this is how He talked to His disciples because they asked Him, why? Jesus, why’re You speaking in parables? “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, so that they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand...” Jesus is using this same wording here with His disciples in the boat. Realize how strong this is; Jesus is essentially asking them, are you on the outside, too? Are you thinking you’re on the inside, but really, you’re on the outside, and you have no idea. Are you missing all of this? Is that what’s happening?

And we go down to the end of verse 18, and Jesus has to do this simple exercise with them. Let's just go back into the recent past, not too far. How about that one time when there was, I don't know, say five loaves for five thousand people? How'd that go? Alright? He has to ask them. He has to remind them, you were with Me. Remember when there was twenty thousand people, and we had 5 loaves? What happens? And when there was sixteen thousand people, and we had seven loaves? What happens? They shouldn't be able to know this because, well, with that, they were asleep in the boat, and they read the paper the next day, or they heard someone tell them about it, or they got some of the leftovers. They were there. The disciples were with Jesus. They become waiters and distributors; they go with Jesus, and they take the bread, and they give it to the people. They saw all this happen just recently, and yet Jesus has to ask them these same routine questions. What happened then? Did everyone get food? You bet everyone got food. There were plenty of leftovers. That's why I have to tell you, how "...many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?" He has to go through this with them. They need to understand. And here, the ending question, "And he said to them, 'Do you not yet understand?'" "Do you still not get it?"

That question kind of frames this whole section. Right? If you look back at the beginning again, the second question in this, back up in 17; "Do you not yet perceive or understand?" And here at the end; "And he said to them, 'Do you not yet understand?'" "Do you not get it? Are you really worried about bread? Are you really worried about this? Are you really concerned that there's nothing God can do? There's nothing I as the Messiah can do? Is that really what you think? Are you on the outside? Are you just like the Pharisees? Are you one of them? Do you even have faith? Do you believe? The disciples were ignoring God's work through Jesus and these feedings. They saw it, but they'd completely forgotten and ignored the work of God right around them, totally obvious and evident. The disciples were really on the same path to unbelief as the Pharisees. It's the risk. It's the risk factor. Just as the Pharisees were exposed to the Word of God and the works of God, and they didn't respond, and so they were abandoned by God, so now, too, the disciples are in this same situation. There's a risk involved. They're on the cusp of potentially failing and having this faithless and unbelieving response and then going the way of the Pharisees where God will abandon them. Jesus will be done with them. This is the position they're in if they

continue to ignore the work of God, if they continue to neglect the Word of God and not respond accordingly.

What a danger. What an obligation. What a burden we have. Yes, the joy... Don't get me wrong, the privilege that we have of singing about the works of God and the joy that it is to look at this and to study the Word of God now and for ourselves throughout the week; what a joy, but at the same time, what a responsibility, what a burden we need to feel. We have to respond. There has to be change. There must be transformation otherwise we're potentially running the risk of being in the same path as the Pharisees that were abandoned by Christ. What's the remedy? How do we solve this? How do we not run this risk and not completely walk ourselves off the cliff? How can we secure our relationship with God? How can we prevent this idea of God abandoning us and us becoming like these Pharisees? What do we do?

This comes back to what we do with the work of God and the Word of God. The work of God, so evident, so clear, obvious in your life; His compassions are new every morning, and you know it. You wake up every morning, and you know it. Whether or not you want to think on it or remember it, they're there. His compassions are new, and you either neglect it - you neglect the work of God, or you respond to it, and you thank Him for it. His Word, it's here. It's taught right now. You go to Bible study, you hear it some more. You read it on your own. You're exposed to the Word of God. It doesn't end there. There has to be a response. There are those who are here that have not come to this place where they have this relationship with God. They think this is a foreign concept - a relationship with God? I don't know what I think about that. I would ask you just consider, consider the works of God. Take a moment to consider what God has done in creating you and putting you on this planet, His lavishing His goodness upon you and giving you life, but not just that, His love and His grace, the fact that you, as a rebel, as a sinner, as one who is not perfect in measuring up to His standard can have a remedy. You can have a Savior you can have the love of God demonstrated towards you, and the fact that while you were in your sin, Christ came and died for you. He's the substitute, the One who took the punishment of God in your place, and you can have that. You can have that joy of knowing God because of what Christ did. Consider the work of God and respond.

For those of you that are saved, that have this relationship with God because of His Son, amen, praise God, hallelujah for that Savior, but I would ask

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you, examine yourself - examine yourself. Don't get comfortable. Make sure that you are responding to the Word of God. Make sure that it actually is doing something, it's not just piling up in your head and becoming more knowledge because we've seen that story before. It's the Pharisees, and you could be the Pharisees round two. Don't do it. Respond to the Word of God. Believe the Word of God. Obey the Word of God. Submit to the Word of God. Let it change your life. Let it dominate the way you live. Watch yourself that you respond in faith to the Word of God; failure to do so is running the risk of being in the place where God abandons you. You've had all the exposure you need. You've had all the understanding possible, and yet you don't respond and God will be done with you. He will abandon you.

The charge and really the encouragement that we need is the same that Moses gave to Joshua. Moses himself knowing he's not going into the Promised Land, but Joshua will. He will lead the people, a new generation after that faithless generation that died in the wilderness. Now, Joshua would come and take them into the Promised Land, and what did Moses tell him? What's the key? What's the key to not end up like this previous generation? Deuteronomy 32:44-47; "Moses came and recited all the words of this song in the hearing of the people, he and Joshua the son of Nun. And when Moses had finished speaking all these words to all Israel, he said to them, 'Take to heart all the words by which I am warning you today, that you may command them to your children, that they may be careful to do all the words of this law. For it is no empty word for you, but your very life, and by this word you shall live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess.' " The Word of God is "...your very life..." Don't let it be some empty word to you. Let it be your life. May you, may I, may this entire congregation be careful to do all that is written in the Word of God.