

# DO YOU NOT YET UNDERSTAND?

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Mark 8:11-21

## Introduction:

I love signs – I read signs – on bumper stickers, T-shirts, billboards. Some examples: “I used up all my sick days, so I called in dead.” “Don’t worry what people think; they don’t do it very often.” “Honk if you love Jesus (Keep texting if you want to meet Him)”

Then there is the sign that says, “No dogs allowed (Except seeing eye dogs)” – who is that last part written for? Some signs can be funny. But other signs are vital for our safety and protection. Traffic signs are there to warn us of danger, or to give us direction and instructions on where to go and what to expect up ahead.

One more – on a big billboard: “If you’re waiting for a sign, this is it.”

In the first part of our text today, the Pharisees were looking for a sign from Jesus. In the second part of our text, we see the disciples confused because they don’t understand the signs and the purpose for them.

Let’s try to make our way through these verses and allow the Word to speak to us this morning.

## A Demand for a Sign

- Jesus has just finished a truly incredible miracle – feeding four thousand people with seven loaves of bread and a few small fish.
- He and his disciples took a boat to the west side of the Sea of Galilee – region of Dalmanutha (Magdala) – modern city of Tiberias.
- On arrival they are met by a group of Pharisees – they begin to argue (dispute) with him. They wanted him to prove himself—to prove his claims by a “sign from heaven.”

I am not sure what they expected – some sort of heavenly sign? A sign in the sky? The Bible records heavenly signs done under the ministry of OT prophets: Joshua commanded the sun and moon to stand still

while they fought the Amorites and they obeyed (Joshua 10). Hezekiah asked that the shadow on the sundial go back ten steps as a sign that the Lord would heal him (2 Kings 20). Elijah prayed that the sky would be shut up so it would not rain and it did not rain for 3½ years until he prayed again for rain (1 Kings 17-18)

These Pharisees were after Jesus to get him to show a sign. They were putting him to the test. I think what they really wanted was to get him to attempt a sign and to fail. They wanted him to promise more than he could deliver, so they could discredit him and his ministry. They were well aware of the things he had done already. What they wanted was for him to attempt a miracle and to fail so they could denounce him as a false prophet.

They were not satisfied with all the things he had done already. Somehow, they didn’t think that the miracles he had performed were enough to validate his claim to be the promised Messiah.

Consider for a moment the magnitude of what the Jews had witnessed to this point:

- Jesus had healed the sick.
- He had raised the dead.
- He had delivered people from the bondage of demon possession.
- Jesus had walked on water.
- Jesus had calmed storms.
- Jesus had twice multiplied a meager amount of food and fed vast multitudes with it.
- Jesus had opened the Word of God, preached it clearly and made the meaning of the Scriptures plain to all who heard Him.
- The people were all talking about Him. They said “We never saw anything like this,” (Mark 2:12). They said, “He has done all things well,” (Mark 7:37).

The Pharisees had certainly heard enough from the mouth of Jesus to know the truth. They had seen enough evidence to convince the most stubborn of skeptics. Their problem was simply that they did not want to believe on Jesus! They did not want Him to be their Messiah. So they asked him for a sign, hoping to discredit him.

You know, some things never change. People are still looking for signs. People are attracted to the sensational. People will flock to men and women who promise sensational miracles. People are looking for something supernatural to prove that God exists. And in the meantime, they miss the signs that are all around us.

Like the Pharisees, some people are looking for a sign from heaven, when the truth is that the sign is the heavens. The Psalmist tells us, *“The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.”* (Psalm 19:1 ESV) And then in Psalm 8, *“O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. Out of the mouth of babes and infants, you have established strength because of your foes, to still the enemy and the avenger. When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?”* (Psalm 8:1-4 ESV)

Illust. – Photo from Dot this week – Wed. morning

The Pharisees were demanding a sign from heaven to validate Jesus' claim to be the Messiah. But Jesus could see through their request and understood their true intent. He knew that there was no sign which would convince these self-righteous hypocritical religious leaders.

*Read v. 12a*– again we read that Jesus sighed – see 7:34. In that instance it was a sigh of compassion. This is more a sigh of exasperation. Look at his words – *“Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation.”* Matthew gives us a much more detailed account of Jesus' words to the Pharisees – *Matt. 16:2-4.*

*You can read the sky and predict the weather, but when it comes to spiritual issues and conditions you don't have a clue... you are not going to get any sign, because your heart is corrupt and evil and you will not believe it anyway.*

What follows is a very sad statement. Because of their evil and hard hearts, we read that *“...he left them, got into the boat again, and went to the other side.”* Matthew simply says, *“So he left them and departed.”* There was nothing more to say or do at that point. They refused to believe, and He abandoned them to their choice.

## The Leaven of the Pharisees and Herod

The Pharisees did not understand the truth about Jesus, because they refused to accept His claims. In this next incident, we see the disciples' confusion about Jesus leading to a huge misunderstanding.

The context – they are now in the boat, on their way back across the lake leaving from the district of Dalmanutha (Magdala) and heading toward Bethsaida. Jesus sees a great moment for teaching and gives them a tidbit of advice – *“Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.”*

At the mention of leaven, the disciples' thoughts turn immediately to bread, and the realization that they had brought hardly any bread with them – Mark says they only had one loaf in the boat. That wouldn't go far with twelve hungry disciples. They begin discussing the fact that they have no bread. They are wondering what Jesus meant by that statement. Some possibilities as to what was going through their minds:

- *“Is He rebuking us because we didn't bring any bread with us?”*
- *“Is He saying we should not buy bread from the Pharisees or the Herodians?”*
- *“Is he telling us that we should have no fellowship with the Pharisees and the Herodians?”*

Obviously, none of these answers are right. Jesus, knowing what was in their minds and what they were talking about, asks pointedly, *“Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread?”*

Clearly his warning about the leaven had nothing to do with bread or their lack of it. He was using the idea of leaven as an object lesson. You see, leaven in the Scriptures is a symbol for sin and corruption. Just like yeast works in a lump of dough to change the whole thing, so sin works in our lives to affect everything we do.

1 Cor. 5:6-7 – *“...Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened...”*

So, what is the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod? Well the leaven of the Pharisees is defined for us in Luke 12:1:

*“Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.”* There you have it – the Pharisees were religious men, but their religion was only on the outside. Outwardly they did all the right things, yet Jesus said their hearts were filled with wickedness. In Matt. 23, Jesus likened them to whitewashed tombs, outwardly beautiful, but inwardly, filled with dead men’s bones.

Jesus is warning his disciples, and us, of the danger of hypocrisy. This is something I think we all struggle with. We are masters of pretending that our hearts are where they ought to be with God. Jesus is warning us, beware of the leaven of hypocrisy.

What about the leaven of Herod. In the parallel passage in Matthew, Jesus says, Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Alan Carr describes it this way:

*“The Pharisees were the religious conservatives of the day while the Sadducees were the religious liberals. They were worldly and secular and they joined forces with King Herod in compromising with the Romans. These people, both the Sadducees and the followers of Herod, are often called “Herodians”. The leaven that infiltrated their lives and teaching was materialism, worldliness and compromise with the world.”*

So, Jesus is warning his disciples, and us, not to get caught up in the quest for this world’s goods at the expense of our relationship with God. Seeking the favor of the world will put us at enmity with God.

*James 4:4 – “You adulterous people! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”*

The issue is not food – it is not bread as the disciples supposed. Jesus reminds them of the miracles they had experienced in the feeding of the crowds. He is perfectly capable of caring for them and for us. The issue is the hypocrisy and the worldliness that so easily creeps into our lives and draws us away from trusting Him.

He finishes by asking the piercing question, *“Do you not yet understand?”*

## Conclusion

So, what is the real issue in our text this morning? It is not really about the leaven of the Pharisees and the Herodians. It’s really about faith. You see, what Jesus is really trying to teach His disciples is that it isn’t what you have or what you can do that matters. Everything in your spiritual life comes down to trusting Jesus fully and completely, knowing that He will never fail you.

The Pharisees who came asking for a sign did not understand the heart of the issue because they **refused** to believe that Jesus was the Messiah. The disciples did not understand because they were **confused**. They were confused about who Jesus really was and what He could do and what He wanted to do for them.

What about us? What about you? Do you understand? Jesus does not want us to live our lives focused on earthly matters like bread. But, that is so often the case. He wants us to understand that a lack of bread is not our real problem. Our biggest problem is a lack of faith!

How often do we see and hear, but do not comprehend? How often do we read His Word, but do not fully believe it? How often do we experience His power, but are still not quite convinced that we can trust Him completely?

We need to examine our lives in the light of what He has done and what He promises to do for us. He is calling us to radical, total faith in Him. He is calling us to lay aside our **“what if’s”** and our **“how’s”**. He is calling us to trust Him.