

Matthew 16:1-12

Good morning everyone it's good to be with you this morning as we continue our series on the Book of Matthew. It's an interesting little section of Matthew we have been looking at as Jesus has sought to redefine what it means to be a follower of God in the world. This hasn't been a smooth process, as Jesus is bringing his Kingdom into the world he has face opposition from the worldly kingdoms that are already there. Not everyone is keen on the changes and not everyone is keen on Jesus. That brings us to our passage today.

How about I start by praying for us?

Asch Conformity Experiment.

[Give me a sign.](#)

The Sadducees and Pharisees have come to Jesus together. This is an incredible thing you see these guys agree on just about nothing, them looking at the scriptures is like Queenslanders and New South Welshmen looking at the same refereeing call in Origin. They are aggressively opposing groups who would never unite on anything. They are from two different strands of Judaism The Sadducees are concerned mainly with the temple, so they are a long way from home here and they would only read the first 5 books of the old testament. The Pharisees were an influential teaching group who were resistant to the social movements embraced by the Sadducees, and so they would spend most of their time arguing. For them to come to Jesus together, they have clearly decided that he is a big enough threat to them to require being dealt with so they can get back to fighting amongst themselves.

They start with a request that Jesus got all the time but a request that I think we are all familiar with.

The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven.

²He replied, "When evening comes, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,' ³and in the morning, 'Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.^(a) ⁴A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah." Jesus then left them and went away.

They ask him for a sign. Jesus if you are who you say you are show us another sign from heaven. Prove yourself to us. Forgetting about all the signs that they have seen up until this point. I have people in my life who for them they say that all they need to become a Christian is a sign. We can see that for these people the teachers of the law no number of signs is enough and the intentions of the Jewish teachers are not genuine. They are simply looking for another opportunity to have a go at Jesus and attempt to demonstrate him to be a false teacher. They want to question his identity and undermine his message as a result.

You can imagine Jesus is pretty frustrated by this point and so he turns it around on them. They are able to interpret really complex things like the weather and astrology, yet they are not able to interpret the signs which are being performed before them and in fact that they are being willingly ignorant of. They have been given all the signs that they need to see who he is and in fact are going to have a greater sign which he refers to as the sign of Jonah. Ill come back to that in a bit.

Of course the disciples, they aren't a whole bunch better in this situation. They continue on in their journey.

⁵When they went across the lake, the disciples forgot to take bread. ⁶“Be careful,” Jesus said to them. “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

⁷They discussed this among themselves and said, “It is because we didn't bring any bread.”

Can everyone just quickly look at the passage which comes immediately before our one today at the end of chapter 15. Has the question of enough bread ever been a problem for Jesus in the history of ever? This theme that you will have noticed, of everyone who is Jewish complete failure to understand who Jesus is or realising and then suddenly forgetting is continuing. It isn't until Jesus explains in what seems like an annoyed tone that they realise he is talking about the false teaching of the Sadducees and the Pharisees. What is this teaching? Well because these two groups disagree on everything other than Jesus we know that this false teaching is the undermining of who Jesus is, and the Gospel. It is yeast because you only need a little bit of it to have a big effect.

The Yeast

This part of Matthew as you have probably noticed over the past few weeks is primarily concerned with Jesus' identity, with understanding who Jesus is. And we see this attacked in a number of ways and we see it demonstrated in a number of ways. Clearly when Matthew was writing his gospel he could feel the importance of making this clear and is likely responding to attacks to Jesus' identity in his context.

Jesus' identity, the message of the gospel, and the Christian faith that comes from these has always had to deal with the problem of the yeast of the Pharisees. Coping with external pressures to change to abandon the message. Opposition has always been an issue and the preaching of the truth of the gospel has always been under threat. Whether it is to undermine who Jesus is completely or to change Jesus and the Gospel into something that might serve our means. Persecutions of Christians who held to this truth started early on in the 1st and 2nd centuries. The world around them hated who they claimed Jesus to be and attacked and killed many of them. Yet they would love their enemies, and pray for those who persecuted them.

Later though Christians would let yeast, false teaching about the gospel effect their own actions. They would justify crusades, inquisitions, slavery.

Today the external pressures of the world to change our message, to change who we declare Jesus to be are continuing. We aren't under threat of being thrown to the lions which is nice. But social pressure has rarely been at the height that it is to soften our message. In the past you could go home. But now for lots of us the world has a route into our houses, via our phones and computers and also to an extent our televisions. We are being told about how evil and stupid our message is. That we are foolish and selfish. That we should be excluded from the public arena.

The Pharisees and Sadducees wanted to paint Jesus in a negative light. He criticised their way of doing things, he pointed out their hypocrisy. There is no figure in history who has been as scathing of religious hypocrisy than Jesus. They wanted people to think he was demon possessed that he was working for the evil powers of the universe. That he was dangerous that he should be silenced, dealt with. That is the response from the world that the truth of the Gospel will receive. People will try to silence it, people will call it dangerous because if they do that they can justify doing what they want to it. They will pressure the church to change its message.

The Bread

The disciples are so concerned with earthly, material concerns in this passage that they completely miss the warning Jesus gives them. They have forgotten that lacking bread hasn't been a problem so far, why would it be now. Guys you are with the baker. You are with as John puts it's, the bread of live himself. And in response to Jesus warning they completely miss the point.

Jesus is saying, remember who I am, remember the truth. There is going to be a time when the world tries to change my message tries to tell you and others I am something I am not and you need to be ready. Be aware. Don't be distracted.

This has happened all over the world to the church and in many places we have not stood strong. Around Australia outside of Sydney and Armidale it is not difficult to find an Anglican Church which does not hold to the teachings of Christ, does not declare him as ultimate King, does not declare that he raised from the dead and is seated at the right hand of the father. Instead Jesus has become a good moral teacher. That has happened because the society we are in wants Jesus to be that and only that. Oh that teaching is outdated, get with the times, Jesus didn't mean that when he said that. Its 2019 after all. People don't raise from the dead that's stupid give me a sign, show me proof. Churches potentially out of a desire to get on with the societies they are in have changed to suit those pressures. When Jesus' kingdom is being brought into the world by the truth being taught by his people then the kingdoms of the world, whether an ideology, the media, your friends, will clash with it. They will degrade, they will attack, they will shame, they will silence, but we must be ready to stand firm.

On the other side of this though I think there is a second way, a more subtle way, that the yeast of the Sadducees and Pharisees works into us. We are tempted to mirror our society in how we respond to the pressure they put on us. Implicitly we let the teaching that responding to attack with hate is ok, I'm just standing up for Jesus right. but that is yeast too degrading the message of the Gospel. How easy is it to get caught up in a Facebook

argument? To write angry comments on articles. To think hateful thoughts about those who undermined Jesus. To outrage at the perceived injustices against our rights as society becomes less tolerant of us. I mentioned before the Christians who were persecuted less than 100 years after the death of Jesus. People who were sent to their death for believing in Jesus. One of them is a hero of mine, his name is Ignatius. And this is what he wrote to Christians facing this persecution, he himself would be killed by the Romans not long after this: "In response to their anger, be gentle; in response to their boasts, be humble; in response to their slander, offer prayers; in response to their errors, be steadfast in the faith; in response to their cruelty, be civilized; do not be eager to imitate them. Let us show by our forbearance that we are their brothers and sisters, and let us be eager to be imitators of the Lord."

Friends we cannot let this happen. We have a responsibility to stick to the truth of who Jesus is. That he is the bread of life, the son of God, sent from heaven to die for our sin, and that three days later he rose again in a physical body. That he called on his followers to love each other, to love their enemies, to pray for those who persecute them. What does resistance of the yeast of the false teaching look like? Stand firm to the truth of who Jesus is, what he's done for you, and how you should live in response. Tell this truth unashamedly to the world and never change the message. And then love the people who hate you for it. Love them, pray for them. You have the bread of life. You have the man himself. We don't need to worry about bread. We need to trust the truth. That is the truth that brings life. Not anything the world can offer you instead and its hatred will never change that. But we don't need to hate in response.

[We have the only sign we need](#)

I want to come back to the sign of Jonah. Jesus tells the Sadducees and the Pharisees they will get no other sign than the sign of Jonah. Jesus has mentioned this before in Matthew 12. I'm sure most people here are familiar with the story of Jonah. ³⁸Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from you."

³⁹He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. ⁴⁰For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. ⁴¹The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now something greater than Jonah is here.

Jesus, the son of man dies for us and was raised from the dead. We believe in a God who proved his power, who proved his worth who proved he was the truth when he came back to life in a physical body from the grave. Sometimes I crave another sign that Jesus is true, I'm sure you do to. But we have the only sign we will ever need, proof beyond doubt of who Jesus is, and that he is worth following. The Pharisees had that sign and they rejected it. Let's be better than that. Let's hold to this truth firmly, refusing to ever change, and love people, even when they hate us for it. That is resisting the yeast of the false teachers.