

**Matthew 16:1-12:** And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, & to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. <sup>2</sup> He answered them, "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' <sup>3</sup> & in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. <sup>4</sup> An evil & adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah." So he left them & departed. <sup>5</sup> When the disciples reached the other side, they had forgotten to bring any bread. <sup>6</sup> Jesus said to them, "Watch & beware of the leaven of the Pharisees & Sadducees." <sup>7</sup> & they began discussing it among themselves, saying, "We brought no bread." <sup>8</sup> But Jesus, aware of this, said, "O you of little faith, why are you discussing among yourselves the fact that you have no bread? <sup>9</sup> Do you not yet perceive? Do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand, & how many baskets you gathered? <sup>10</sup> Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, & how many baskets you gathered? <sup>11</sup> How is it that you fail to understand that I did not speak about bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees & Sadducees." <sup>12</sup> Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees & Sadducees.

**Intro:** Last week, we saw that Jesus loves & has compassion on all peoples! Jesus is the Healer! Jesus fed the 4,000 plus! Jesus is the Bread of Life! And Jesus alone is Satisfier of every human soul from every tribe, tongue, language, & people! This week we see wicked religious leaders seek a sign; we see Jesus warn His disciples of false teaching, & we see that Jesus Himself is the great sign Who has come down from heaven!

In our text today, we see two different groups, Jewish religious leaders & Jesus' disciples, & they both are deaf and blind to the Sign of signs – they are deaf and blind to the sign of all time! But Jesus treats them differently because of their hearts. My prayer is that through studying God's Word this morning, we will not be deaf and blind to this sign, but see Him, trust Him, embrace Him, love Him, obey Him, and delight in Him as never before!

### **1. Wicked Men Come To Test Jesus**

**Matthew 16:1-4:** And the Pharisees and Sadducees came, & to test him they asked him to show them a sign from heaven. <sup>2</sup> He answered them, "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' <sup>3</sup> & in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. <sup>4</sup> An evil & adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah." So he left them & departed.

**a. The Pharisees and Sadducees:** These were Jewish religious leaders – they're the ones who knew the law & taught the law & were thought of by the people as the holy ones, like the pastors, the true saints, the leaders in holiness and righteousness. But as we've seen throughout Matthew, they were hypocrites, outward show, breaking God's commandments, & worshiping God with their lips while their hearts were far from God! The Pharisees & Sadducees had different beliefs & opposed one another: **Acts 23:6-8:** Now when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, "Brothers, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees. It is with respect to the hope and the resurrection of the dead that I am on trial." <sup>7</sup> And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided. <sup>8</sup> For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, but the Pharisees acknowledge them all.

**b. The Pharisees and Sadducees come to test Jesus:** The scene has the feel of war to it – the Pharisees & Sadducees come out against Him, arguing with Him and seeking to test or tempt Him. Seeds of the serpent!

**We see the Garden of Eden replayed:** Who did the first tempting in the Bible? Satan in the Garden of Eden.

- **Matthew 4:1:** Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

- **1 Peter 5:8:** Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.

Satan seeks to oppose and defeat all that is good – in this text and in your life.

These Jewish leaders wanted a sign from heaven: not merely a miracle, but as **Cranfield** put it: an “outward compelling proof of divine authority.” Moses & Manna; the sun & moon stood still for Joshua; fire for Elijah

**We see the sins of Israel replayed: Exodus 17:2:** Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Give us water to drink." And Moses said to them, "Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the LORD?"

**c. Asking for a sign is not always evil:** John the Baptist asked for a sign: **Matthew 11:2-6:** Now when John heard in prison about the deeds of the Christ, he sent word by his disciples <sup>3</sup> and said to him, "Are you the one who is to come, or shall we look for another?" <sup>4</sup> And Jesus answered them, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: <sup>5</sup> the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them. <sup>6</sup> And blessed is the one who is not offended by me."

Look at all Jesus has done up to this point in Matthew's Gospel! Are these signs not enough! They should be! Jesus cast out demons and these Jewish leaders accused Him of doing it by the power of Satan!

May we not tempt the LORD with our lack of faith!

**d. Jesus rebukes the Pharisees & Sadducees:** We see here Jesus triumph over all who would oppose Him & tempt Him: Jesus does not give them what they want. **Verses 2-4:** He answered them, "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' & in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red & threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times. An evil & adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah." So he left them & departed.

**Mark Dever:** They were better as untrained weather men than as trained theologians.

Even if Jesus gave them a sign, it would not change their unbelieving hearts: **Luke 16:31:** He said to him, "If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead."

The evidence is not the problem – their sinful, unbelieving heart is the problem! Jesus calls them evil/adulterous!

**e. Only the sign of Jonah will be given to them: Matthew 12:38-41:** Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." <sup>39</sup> But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. <sup>40</sup> For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. <sup>41</sup> The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here."

**William Hendriksen:** What a sign this death and resurrection would be for the Pharisees, who were concerned, who were constantly planning Jesus death, with no fear that He would ever be able to conquer death. And what a sign it was for the Sadducees, who did not even believe in a resurrection. That would be the sign given to them that He was, indeed, the Messiah.

## **2. Jesus Warns His Disciples About The False Teaching Of The Pharisees And Sadducees**

**Matthew 16:5-12:** When the disciples reached the other side, they had forgotten to bring any bread. <sup>6</sup> Jesus said to them, "Watch & beware of the leaven of the Pharisees & Sadducees." <sup>7</sup> & they began discussing it among themselves, saying, "We brought no bread." <sup>8</sup> But Jesus, aware of this, said, "O you of little faith, why are you discussing among yourselves the fact that you have no bread? <sup>9</sup> Do you not yet perceive? Do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand, & how many baskets you gathered? <sup>10</sup> Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, & how many baskets you gathered? <sup>11</sup> How is it that you fail to understand that I did not speak about bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees & Sadducees." <sup>12</sup> Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of

the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees & Sadducees.

**a. Jesus warns His disciples of the leaven of the Pharisees & Sadducees:** What does Jesus mean by the leaven or yeast of the Pharisees & Sadducees? Leaven or yeast is often used in the Bible as a picture of evil – that which opposes God. The disciples will learn that those teachers they & their people have always held in high regard are deadly, & their teaching is deadly! Beware! Their teaching opposes God! In their unbelief, they oppose Jesus!

**b. Jesus' disciples misunderstand Him:** Jesus warns His disciples about dangerous false teaching, but they are fixated on not having any bread! But they are with Jesus! Do they not remember what Jesus has done!

**Sinclair Ferguson:** One of the great marks of true spiritual growth is this: If we know that Christ is with us, we will not [break down or fret] under frustrating Providences.

**Thomas Watson:** Has God taken away your only child? He has given His only Son. This is a happy exchange. What need does he have to complain of losses who has Christ? He is His Father's brightness, His fullness, & His delight. Is there enough in Christ to delight the heart of God? & is there not enough in Him to ravish us with holy delight? He is wisdom to teach us, righteousness to acquit us, sanctification to adorn us. He is that royal & princely gift. He is the bread of angels, the joy & triumph of saints. He is "all in all." Why then are you discontented?

This is amazing indeed! The infinite, everlasting, all-mighty, all-knowing, all-glorious God of all the universe has been absolutely satisfied with Christ in the fellowship of the Holy Trinity from all eternity. Is Christ, then, not enough for us, mere finite vapors? Christ must be all! If He is enough to satisfy the infinite, then He is enough for you, no matter what you lose in this life. You don't have bread disciples! Really! But You have Christ! You have all

**c. Jesus challenges His disciples' faith and understanding: Verses 8-11:** But Jesus, aware of this, said, "O you of little faith, why are you discussing among yourselves the fact that you have no bread?"<sup>9</sup> Do you not yet perceive? Do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand, & how many baskets you gathered?<sup>10</sup> Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, & how many baskets you gathered?<sup>11</sup> How is it that you fail to understand that I did not speak about bread? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees & Sadducees."

Jesus focuses on the number of full baskets left over. In the Jewish territory He feeds the 5,000 and there were 12 baskets left over pointing us to the 12 tribes of Israel – Jesus is the Savior of His people Israel. In the Gentile territory He heals and feeds the 4,000 and there were 7 baskets left over pointing us to the number of completion or the 7 Gentile nations (Deut. 7) – Jesus is the Savior of all the nations! And Jesus provides an abundance of bread!

Yet the disciples still weren't getting it! They still don't seem to understand that Jesus can provide all they need! The Canaanite woman got it! She understood that Jesus can provide! She even understand Jesus' use of bread!

**d. Jesus disciples finally understand: Verse 12:** Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees & Sadducees.

**e. Biblical, true, right, accurate, godly, sound teaching matters: Acts 20:29-30:** I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;<sup>30</sup> and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

- **1 Timothy 4:16:** Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

- **2 Peter 2:1:** But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies

**Thomas Brooks (*Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*) Seven marks of a false prophet:**

- 1) They are man-pleasers, not God-pleasers
- 2) They criticize faithful teachers
- 3) They preach from their own imaginations, not the Bible
- 4) They major on the minors (always talking about healing, financial success, etc.)
- 5) They cover their false teaching with pleasing speech (they even use the Bible, like the devil when he tempted)
- 6) They care more about winning followers than caring about seeing their followers grow in grace & righteousness
- 7) They use their followers for financial gain

**f. What happens if you ignore warning signs?** “Touching Wires Causes Death;” “Cliff Edge Ahead – Stay Back”

- **John the Baptist: Matthew 3:2:** Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

- **Matthew 3:7:** You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the coming wrath?

- **Jesus: Mark 1:15:** The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the GOSPEL.

**3. Everyone Was Missing Jesus: The Greatest Sign**

**Isaiah 7:14:** Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.

At Christmas time, we just celebrated the coming into the world of the Greatest Sign this world has ever seen or ever will see – in the Person of Jesus Christ – God Who came to dwell among us. Yet so many ignore or miss this sign! Jesus is not merely a warning sign, but He's a sign of the fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore that are found in God – God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit!

And what did this great Sign of all signs do so that we might be saved? He became the foulest of our sins on that cross so that we could be saved! He was made all the sins of hardheartedness and misunderstanding of the truth on that cross and punished by His Father in our place so that we could be saved if we repent and believe in Him. And He didn't stay dead! He was raised from the dead for our justification and salvation!

**Jesus Is The Greatest Sign That Ever Came; All Leaven To Set Aflame; And Hard Hearts To Reclaim; Bringing Glory To His Most Precious Name!**

A sign from heaven they wickedly sought  
To test our LORD is all for naught  
His Divine nature they never caught  
The greatest sign is the Christ Who taught  
He's the most brilliant sign ever wrought  
Against all evil He victoriously fought  
To end all things making us distraught  
For sinners He died and salvation brought  
He rose to end every evil onslaught  
He's more excellent than all you've ever thought  
So trust in Him just as you ought!

He's the most excellent sign Who came down from heaven  
Through His Person and Work He purifies all leaven  
He showed His glory in the baskets left over – seven!

When you try to put God to the test  
His reply will come back with zest  
With Him they shouldn't have messed  
Back against them with truth He pressed

He refused to grant their request  
Because He Himself is the sign they suppressed  
With Him they should have been impressed  
But instead they would eventually arrest  
Have Him undressed and in His face spit and jest  
Yet out of His mouth there would be no protest  
And He would endure what most distressed  
As He died for the oppressed  
And was raised to give those rest  
Who with Him alone would be obsessed!

He warned of the Pharisee and Herod yeast  
It's unbelief, false teaching, and evil like the mark of the beast  
It will cause your love and joy to cease  
But in Christ we have the most satisfying feast  
He's our sympathetic, great High Priest  
Who on that cross gruesomely deceased  
So that our joy in Him would forever increase  
From all our sin we can be released  
It's removed from us as far as west is from east  
All who trust are forgiven from the greatest to the least!

The disciples seem clueless and unaware  
Lack of physical bread had captured their care  
Though Christ just made two feasts from thin air  
Their hearts are hard and in need of repair  
They lack contentment in the Christ Who's there  
New hearts for His own He came to prepare  
For a new heart you must bow to Him in prayer  
He'll save you from all sin that might ensnare  
By grace alone He won't give you what's fair  
For in His Son, you're righteous He will declare  
And your love for evil He'll slowly tear  
As a son of the King, He numbers your hair  
This world has nothing that with Him can compare!

He's the promised Messiah of every nation  
And God's "Amen!" to all prophetic expectation  
The disciples missing this is a baffling irritation  
He came to let the nations be glad with joyous acclamation  
As they glorify Him for His perfect death of consecration  
And His resurrection that ended His people's condemnation  
To glorify His Father for purchasing such a great salvation!

Christ Jesus Is The Greatest Sign  
He's Sinless Man With Strong, Steel Spine  
And God In Flesh Who Is Divine  
There's No One Like Him Who's So Fine  
All Beauty Does In Him Combine  
Pure Perfection He'd Define  
He Is Our All, Our Truth, Our Vine

Who Warns Of Wicked Teachers Swine  
He Died For Sinners Who'd Malign  
But Rose Alive To Death Consign  
To Hell Forever There Confine  
But We Are Free In His Bloodline  
By Faith Alone He Does Assign  
The Status "Righteous" God's Design  
Of His Love There's No Coastline  
He Sings O'er Us And Calls Us "Mine!"  
So Praise His Name, Let Your Light Shine!

**Mark Dever:** We should be signs that point to the greatest sign!