

8/23/26

Sermon Title: Beware of the Yeast

Preacher: Pastor Kim Soonbae

Scripture Passage: Matthew 16:1-12

The Demand for a Sign

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

² He replied, “When evening comes, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,’

³ and 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.

⁴ A 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.

The Yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees

⁵ When 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.”

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

⁸ Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, “You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread?

⁹ Do you still not understand? Don’t you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered?

¹⁰ Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered?

¹¹ How is it you don’t understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

¹² Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

After performing the miracle of feeding the four thousand with seven loaves and a few small fish, Jesus left the area and went with His disciples to Magadan.

There, the Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and asked Him to show them a sign from heaven, rather than merely a miracle performed on earth.

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

For example, they were asking for signs like the miracle of manna from heaven when the Israelites had nothing to eat in the wilderness after the Exodus and Moses prayed; the miracle when Joshua, while fighting the Amorites in the conquest of Canaan, prayed and the sun and moon stood still; and the miracle on Mount Carmel when Elijah confronted the prophets of Baal and Asherah, and, in response to Elijah's prayer, fire came down from heaven and consumed the sacrifice and even the water around the altar.

These were the kinds of signs they were demanding.

They were essentially saying that if Jesus would perform such a sign, they would recognize Him as the Son of God and the Messiah who had come from heaven.

There was nothing inherently wrong with asking for a sign.

The problem was that, even though Jesus had already demonstrated through His miracles that He was the Messiah who had come as the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy, they continued to demand signs with evil intentions.

Their purpose was not to examine Jesus in order to believe that He was the Messiah.

Rather, they were looking for a way to discredit Him and bring Him down.

What they needed was not another sign or miracle, but pure and wholehearted faith in Christ.

The Pharisees and Sadducees were completely different groups in their beliefs, ideologies, and religious convictions, and they were normally in opposition to one another.

Yet they joined forces in an attempt to bring Jesus down.

At that time, Judaism had three major religious groups: the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and the Essenes.

The Pharisees believed in the resurrection and the existence of angels, and they strictly observed the Law of Moses as well as the oral traditions.

The Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection or the afterlife.

They were pragmatic in their outlook and generally sympathetic toward Rome.

The Essenes rejected the Jerusalem Temple establishment and practiced a strict communal and ascetic lifestyle in the wilderness.

Jesus already knew the evil intentions of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Therefore, He told them that no sign would be given to them except the sign of Jonah, and He rebuked them for their foolishness in failing to discern the signs of the times.

² He replied, "When evening comes, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,'

³ and 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.

⁴ A 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.

Jesus rebuked the Pharisees and Sadducees, saying, "You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times."

They possessed enough worldly knowledge to look at the sky and predict the weather, yet because of their spiritual ignorance, they could not discern the signs of the times.

Their hearts had become evil and corrupt, and as a result, they had lost the ability to perceive the truth.

When they asked Jesus to show them a sign, He told them that no sign would be given to them except the sign of Jonah.

Jesus referred to the sign of Jonah because it would be the decisive sign that would break through the conventional assumptions of the Pharisees and scribes, who had closed the eyes of their hearts and chosen to remain on the path of sin, and would call them to become new people.

Through the sign of Jonah, Jesus was foreshadowing His own death and resurrection.

However, the Pharisees and Sadducees who heard these words did not understand what He meant, and Jesus left them.

Jesus' departure signified a break in fellowship with Him.

This separation was not merely a break in their personal relationship with Jesus; it also meant that they were forfeiting the opportunity to receive His blessing.

Jesus then went with His disciples to the northeastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, toward the region of Caesarea Philippi, which was across from Magadan.

It was then that the disciples realized that they had forgotten to bring bread with them.

They had only one loaf of bread among them.

It seems that, because of the mounting tension between Jesus and the Pharisees and Sadducees, the disciples had hurriedly left Magadan and had been distracted. When the disciples mentioned this to Jesus, He suddenly said to them, "Be careful. Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

⁵ When 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.”

Yeast is an agent that causes food to ferment. When yeast is added to food, it causes the food to ferment.

The Bible uses this characteristic of yeast as a symbol of sin, such as hypocrisy and evil.

The idea is that when sin enters a person’s heart, it spreads and gradually corrupts and changes that person.

Here, Jesus also uses the word “yeast” to symbolize the false teachings of religious leaders who were misleading the common people.

When the disciples told Jesus that they had no bread because they had forgotten to bring any, Jesus suddenly said to them, “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

The “yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees” refers to their false teachings.

The false teaching of the Pharisees was legalism—the emphasis on the outward form of the Law while forgetting its fundamental spirit.

The false teaching of the Sadducees was secularism—the denial of the resurrection and eternal life and an exclusive focus on the things of this world.

However, the disciples still did not understand what Jesus was saying.

They kept repeating that they had not brought any bread with them.

The disciples were spiritually ignorant and failed to understand the true meaning of Jesus’ words.

Instead, they were preoccupied with the immediate, practical problem caused by their own mistake—the fact that they had not brought bread and therefore had nothing to eat.

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

Because the disciples were so focused on their immediate, practical concerns, they interpreted Jesus’ spiritual teaching as a statement about an earthly, material problem.

Jesus had rebuked the Pharisees and Sadducees because, despite having witnessed numerous signs and miracles, they refused to believe and continued to demand miraculous signs of their own choosing.

Yet now the disciples were displaying the very same attitude of unbelief as the Pharisees and Sadducees.

They had witnessed Jesus and His miracles, but they still failed to understand who He truly was.

Jesus rebuked the disciples for their materialistic way of thinking.

He then reminded them once again of the miracles of the five loaves and two fish and the seven loaves and a few small fish, calling their attention to the spiritual significance of these two miracles.

⁸ Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, “You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread?”

⁹ Do you still not understand? Don’t you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered?

¹⁰ Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered?

Even though the disciples had witnessed Jesus perform the supernatural miracles of feeding five thousand people with five loaves and two fish and four thousand people with seven loaves and a few small fish, they remained trapped in their

worries and anxieties about the visible, worldly concerns of “What shall we eat?” and “What shall we wear?”

Jesus rebuked the disciples and again warned them to “be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

Only then did the disciples understand that Jesus was not talking about physical bread, but about the false teachings and corrupt influence of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

¹¹ How is it you don't understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

¹² Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Finally, the disciples understood that when Jesus warned them to “be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees,”

He was not telling them to beware of the yeast used in bread, but to guard themselves against the false teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Beloved members of Church of Godly Dreams,

The Pharisees and Sadducees saw the many signs and miracles Jesus performed, yet they did not believe in Him.

The disciples were different from the Pharisees and Sadducees, but they too failed to fully understand Jesus' words because, despite witnessing His many miracles, they allowed their minds to become preoccupied with practical concerns such as bread.

Why did this happen to them?

It was because they were spiritually ignorant.

Their hearts had become evil and corrupt, and they had lost the ability to discern and understand the truth.

Then what about us?

Have we also forgotten all the grace and miracles God has graciously given us throughout our lives, and, when faced with an immediate problem, found ourselves unable to fully trust Him, instead falling into doubt, anxiety, and worry? Have we forgotten God's faithfulness and become so preoccupied with making a living and taking care of our earthly needs that we have lost sight of Him?

Today, the Lord says to us, "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees."

We must be careful not to allow the wrong values of this world to capture our hearts.

We must not fall into a merely outward and formal faith, and we must guard against a secularized faith that causes us to love the world more than we love God.

Yeast is not easily visible at first.

But even a small amount of yeast spreads throughout the entire batch of dough and eventually changes its character.

The same is true of our hearts.

If we allow even a small amount of unbelief, greed, pride, or worldly thinking to remain unchecked, it can eventually transform our entire way of thinking and our values.

What we need is not more signs.

We have already been given the greatest and most certain sign: Jesus Christ, who died on the cross and rose again on the third day, is the sign of our salvation.

What we need is faith that trusts in the Lord—not anxiety over the bread we do not have, but faith that depends entirely on the Lord who knows our needs and who performed the miracles of the five loaves and two fish and the seven loaves and a few small fish.

Do not let the voices of the world capture your hearts!
Do not allow yourselves to be shaken by false teachings!
Renew your hearts every day through the Word of God!

Let us not be people who continually demand more signs, but people who remember the grace we have already received and believe.

Let us not be people who worry about bread, but people who depend on Jesus, the Bread of Life.

Let us not be people who are permeated by the yeast of the world, but people who embrace the truth of the gospel and live by it.

May you and I keep our eyes fixed on the Lord, who was faithful yesterday, is faithful today, and will remain faithful forever, and may we follow Him in faith to the very end.

In the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, I sincerely bless you all.