**EYES ON JESUS – Leaven of the Pharisees**

Sharable Truth:

**2 Cor. 4:8-9**“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.”

The New Testament was written in some of the hardest times ever experienced in history. WAY harder than anything you or I have endured in our lifetime.

The Roman Empire was brutal, wicked, evil and pervasive. They conquered all of the known lands that most people in their empire had ever even heard of. They set themselves up as gods to be worshiped and made sport of, publicly murdering those who dissented in any way, including the crucifixion of tens of thousands of innocent people.

Our early brothers and sisters thrived in this environment. All of the sweet, encouraging and beautiful sayings of the New Testament were written in this environment, including;

* “In everything give thanks” (1st Thess. 5:18)
* “I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.” (John 15:11)
* **“**Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. **7**and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.” (Phil. 4:6-7)

So yes, we are hard pressed, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair;
persecuted, but not abandoned;
struck down, but not destroyed.

John 16:33 “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you [[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John+16%3A33&version=NKJV#fen-NKJV-26760a)]will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (Jesus)

As we journey through Mark and read about the things Jesus did, and the things He said, Remember, this was the environment when all this took place. God could have selected any time period in History to send Jesus into the world, but He chose this one.

Mark 7, into Mark 8

Chapter 7 ends with Jesus delivering the daughter of a Syrophoenician woman of her demon and healing a deaf-mute man in the Decapolis, both presumably Gentiles.

Chapter 8 begins with another miracle of multiplication, Jesus fed 4,000 people by multiplying 7 loaves and 2 fish.

They then got in a boat and sailed to a place called Dalmanutha *(presumably near Magdala)* on the Northwestern shores of Galilee.

He then gets another visit from the Pharisees…

**LEAVEN OF THE PHARISEES**

**Mark 8:11-25** 11The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven. 12He sighed deeply and said, “Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to it.” **13**Then he left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side.

**14**The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat. **15**“Be careful,” Jesus warned them. “Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod.”

**16**They discussed this with one another and said, “It is because we have no bread.”

**17**Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: “Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? **18**Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don’t you remember? **19**When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?”

“Twelve,” they replied.

**20**“And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?”

They answered, “Seven.”

**21**He said to them, “Do you still not understand?”

**Jesus Heals a Blind Man at Bethsaida**

**22**They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. **23**He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man’s eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, “Do you see anything?”

**24**He looked up and said, “I see people; they look like trees walking around.”

**25**Once more Jesus put his hands on the man’s eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly. **26**Jesus sent him home, saying, “Don’t even go into the village.”

(This latest healing shows several things;

1. This man was presumably a Jew (from Bethsaida), unlike the last two healings.
2. There is no “formula” for healing – He used “spit” just like he did last time, but he didn’t always do it this way. (no special hand position, oil or words)
3. He took him away from the crowds, and once he healed him, told him not to go into town (some versions say “tell no one”). He was still trying to operate in a covert manner, he was NOT trying to make a spectacle of the healings.
4. This healing shows a “progressive” healing as opposed to an “instantaneous” healing. (He first saw men as “trees walking”) : )
	1. Sometimes we can receive healing over a period of time, instead of right away.

*[ Report from man in Ocean Grove last week about my mother’s healing prayer]*

***SEEKING A SIGN***

What’s very peculiar here is that all throughout the gospel of Mark so far, we have seen Jesus do miracle after miracle, healing after healing, deliverance after deliverance, and amaze people throughout the region with his incredible teaching and authority of scripture. Crowds of people followed Him wherever he went and He even the wind and waves obey his every command.

Yet, the Pharisees first question when they approached Him in chapter 8 was “Show us a sign from heaven”?!?!?

**Mark 8:11-12** ”Then the Pharisees came out and began to dispute with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, testing Him. **12***But He sighed deeply in His spirit*, and said, “Why does this generation seek a sign? Assuredly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation.”

He left them got into a boat and headed for Bethsaida, while on the lake he said to them;

**Mark 8;15**“Be careful,” Jesus warned them. “Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod.”

They did not understand what this meant, they thought that since it had the word “yeast” (leaven) in it, it must be because they forgot to bring extra bread for their journey.

Jesus overheard them, and chided them for their unbelief. He had just shown them (twice) that they don’t need to worry about bread while they were with him. There were miracles going on all around them, but they were still relying on their own understanding and self-sufficiency.

V. 18 “Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear?”

V. 21 “Do you still not understand?”

What does this have to do with the “Leaven of the Pharisees”?

**The main question: "What *is* the leaven of the Pharisees?"**

Jesus spoke of the “leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees” in Matthew 16:6, Mark 8:15, and Luke 12:1. As in many of His teachings, Jesus used an everyday item, in this case leaven or yeast, to demonstrate a spiritual truth. In Luke 12:1, Jesus refers to “the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy.” Jesus’ point was that the teachings of the Pharisees were pervasive and produced hypocrisy and unbelief.

Here in Mark 8 when the disciples heard Jesus’ comment about the leaven of the Pharisees, they were quick to jump to a wrong conclusion: “It is because we did not bring any bread,” they said among themselves. Jesus reminded them of the two miracles of; feeding the five thousand and the four thousand and emphasized that they did not need to worry about food. Jesus was not speaking of physical leaven.

Jesus had done many miracles, yet the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Herodians still did not believe in Him.

The man-made teachings of the Pharisees were as pervasive as yeast in a loaf of bread. Their hypocrisy and corruption spread invisibly throughout Judaism until they were content at the fact that they were considered the “gold standard” of godliness even through as Jesus said “their hearts were far from God”.

Jesus sternly warned the disciples against the hypocrisy, or “leaven,” of the Pharisees, Jesus sought to keep His followers from an insidious influence that would undermine their faith and corrupt their walk with God. Believers today should heed the same warning from the Lord and guard against pharisaic attitudes and the temptation to take pride in man-made teachings and traditions or in the pride of displaying conduct or adherence to the law for others to see. Once a bit of “pharisaism” is introduced into the church, it can quickly spread like leaven in a loaf of bread.

That’s when you become more interested in “doing the right things, and not doing the wrong things, and criticizing everyone else who doesn’t live, think and behave like you do”, instead of simply “*loving God and loving others”.* It happens subtly, but can soon take over your whole “loaf”, like yeast does with bread .

When that happens, you need to have a “Pharisectomy” : )

**Ez. 36:26** “**…**I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart.”

Can the “Leaven of the Pharisees take over a church?”

Sadly, yes.

A church can start out with great intentions and being lead by the spirit, but if they are not careful, can find themselves becoming just like the Pharisees, trying to take over what God is doing by the spirit, and continuing it in their own pride.

It happened to the church in Galatia.

Paul addresses it in his letter to the Galatian church in chapter 3.

**Gal. 3:1-2  “**You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. **2**I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard?Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh?”

The leaven is subtle. It may even start with pure motives.

Here’s how…

* We are so overwhelmed with love and gratitude to God for giving us forgiveness and grace that we don’t deserve, that…
* We want to show our gratitude and honor to Him.
* We want to “do” what pleases Him, and “not do” what doesn’t.

This is wonderful, but..

If we are not careful however, the *“doing and not doing”* takes the place of the *“love and gratitude to God for giving us forgiveness and grace that we don’t deserve*”.

We start to become very hard and legalistic on ourselves, beginning to believe that our conduct is the basis for our salvation, instead of Jesus’ blood and God’s free gift of Grace.

We begin to judge ourselves, and eventually others on what we or they *“do and don’t do”* and become critical and accusatory toward them. Before you know it, we have become like those foolish Galatians who began in the spirit but tried to continue by their own efforts.

This is the “Leaven of the Pharisees”.

Unfortunately, many religions are built upon these precepts (you are judged by what you do and don’t do), including some “Christian” doctrines.

Jesus showed the Apostles time and time again that He is enough. All they need to do is follow Him and trust Him.

They followed him all the way to the cross and beyond. They eventually learned that they can fully trust Jesus for *everything* from *daily bread* to *eternal salvation*.

Eventually they learned to trust the Lord with all their hearts (*and minds and strength*) and *not* lean on their own understanding (*or conduct or adherence to the law*).

We need to trust Him the same way.

Knowing that we are lost without Him and there is nothing we can do to “add to” or “take away from” the power of the cross.

Our *obedience to God’s Word* blesses Him mostly because it cultivates fruit in our lives as opposed to thorns. It blesses Him because He loves us.

As we remain humble and grateful to Jesus for doing for us, what we could *not do* for ourselves, we remain free from the Leaven of the Pharisees and see God’s blessing in our lives and in the lives of those we touch.

Let’s commit to *loving* God with all our heart, soul, strength and might.

Let’s continue to *express* our love for him through worship, obedience to His word and by loving others.

Let’s avoid the “*leaven of the Pharisees”,* and being like the “*foolish Galatians*” by acknowledging that we are *saved by God’s amazing grace, not by our own efforts*, so we can’t boast about it, or criticize others for it.

Let’s go into the world with that as our good news, because it’s the greatest news in history.

May Jesus Bless you as you Go!