

## THE RADICAL RABBI: A RADICAL WARNING (Matthew 16:5-12)

10.3.21

**Description:** *Jesus warns the disciples concerning the false teachings and beliefs of the Pharisees and Sadducees — the same group that had just tested Him.*

### INTRODUCTION

Our message today centers around a very common word: “warning.” It most often means a couple of related things:

- (1) A statement or event that indicates a possible or impending danger, problem, or other unpleasant situation. A certain condition in your car may trigger some kind of warning message that something regarding your vehicle needs to be taken care of. And, of course, we see these kinds of messages all the time — particularly with this being a farming area, around pesticides and other ag products.
- (2) Cautionary advice. For instance, we may be shopping indoors someplace and see this sign crossing our path: “Caution: Slippery when wet.” In fact, many of the warnings we see every day fall into this cautionary category; caution is advised because danger is implied. Speed limits warn us that, to be safe, it is best to be slowed to within that speed limit — and also that our driving at excessive speed may be interrupted by a vehicle with all those really pretty flashing lights on top of them.

Sometimes warnings, even when no imminent threat is perceived, can be very important at some future point in time at which we will be thankful that the warning either was strongly communicated before the danger occurred or helped mitigate the destruction when that danger did occur. Anybody here remember the name Rick Rescorla? Rick was the head of security for Morgan Stanley, an investment bank and financial services company headquartered in New York City. In 2001, Morgan Stanley occupied 35 floors in the World Trade Center complex — including 22 floors in the South Tower that housed approximately 2,700 employees. Following the terrorist bombing of the North Tower in February 1993 — a truck bomb in the North Tower’s parking garage that killed six and injured over a thousand — he became convinced that terrorists would try again to attack the World Trade Center complex, only the next time through the air. As a result, he instituted drills that allowed employees to practice over and over again how to evacuate their floors and, eventually, the building. Upper management fought these intrusions on their daily productivity, but Rick insisted.

His warnings and constant rehearsals wound up saving, quite literally, thousands of lives on September 11, 2001. When the first airliner struck the North Tower, the PA system in the South Tower — where Morgan Stanley was located — told everyone to remain in their offices, that their building was safe. Ignoring these announcements, Rick got the firm’s employees headed to the stairwells and out of the building. Because of the constant training which Rick had preached, out of the 2,700 employees at Morgan Stanley that day, only 13 were killed. Ironically, one of those killed was Rick, but not because he ignored his own warnings. Rather, upon evacuating everyone else, he went back into the building

just in case anybody was left behind. He was last seen on about the 10th floor when the South Tower collapsed. Warnings can have incredible importance.

Why look at the definition of a warning? Because Jesus is going to be giving His disciples a warning, a signal of great danger if they do not proceed with the most important information, He could possibly give them. We're going to be grabbing the bulk of our material from Matthew 16, with some generous seasoning from Mark 8. So, as we proceed, let's begin first with a word of prayer.

### **TEXT (Matthew 16:5-12)**

We're actually gonna let Mark's gospel kick off this particular story: ***Then He left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side — Mark 8:13.***

The "He" of course is referring to Jesus. And the "them" Mark references are the Pharisees and Sadducees who, if you remember from last week, were the hosts of that attempted testing of which Jesus was their guest. This was right after Christ and His disciples, following the feeding of the 4,000, had crossed the Sea of Galilee from east to west and arrived in the area around Magdala. The religious leaders had asked for a sign from heaven, Jesus had given them His answer and, in a bow to who won that particular point, He dismissed the meeting. So, Christ and His disciples got back in the boat and returned again to predominately Gentile territory. So, if our understanding is correct, they would have now been moving from the area on the west side of the lake by Magdala and traveled to the northeast to the approximate location of Bethsaida. From there they subsequently would be heading north on foot.

Now you might have thought that the disciples would have been on a little bit of an adrenaline rush, seeing as how their Master had again — and so completely — put His opponents in their place. But no; instead their attention was taken by the lack of supply that they had just realized: ***The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat — Mark 8:14.*** But despite that "oops," which Matthew acknowledged along with Mark, Jesus tried to get them to refocus on the confrontation to which they had just been witness.

***"Be careful," Jesus said to them. "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees" — Jesus Christ, Matthew 16:6.***

The Greek is interesting here. The NIV's phrase, "be careful," is translated from the Greek words, "take heed," which comes from a root that means literally "to stare," meaning to take the time to discern. Jesus was trying to get His disciples to understand the need, both now and in the future, to give themselves permission to take the time to evaluate something presented to them — an argument, a point of view, a disagreement.

And then He underscored His point with basically a rewording of the same idea, with the phrase, "be on your guard" — in the Greek, "beware." Again, His point was to literally hold the mind and be cautious. He was basically telling them not to jump to conclusions about some idea presented to them, or to blindly follow a teacher just because of his training or position. Instead, treat all of this as a detective treats a crime scene. While some people may be very anxious for a conclusion, or very quick to acknowledge a point of

view simply because of tradition, or because of the perceived wisdom and experience of a teacher, a good detective sifts through the evidence, putting it together in a careful way that allows the truth to essentially present itself. This is how they needed to approach and evaluate the teachings of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

And then Christ used a word that would have had an incredible amount of historical, cultural, and religious significance for His Jewish disciples: “yeast” or, in the Greek, “leaven.” Now yeast is the stuff used to produce fermentation in dough — it’s what makes bread rise.

Now leaven could be used as a picture of both good and evil in the Bible. In the OT, it was most often used as a symbol of evil and corruption. In fact, leavened bread was forbidden to be used alongside any burnt offering made to the Lord. Now in the NT, Jesus once used leaven in a parable in a positive way: ***“The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough” — Jesus Christ, Matthew 13:33.*** But here, Jesus was warning the disciples to be on their guard against the “yeast” of the Pharisees — specifically, their legalism, their blatant misrepresentations of God and the Scriptures, and their corruption.

So, what was the commonality in both pictures? Leaven, or yeast, acts powerfully and without ceasing to accomplish its purpose, yet it also does this in a very quiet way, almost without being noticed until the final result appears. For the positive, Jesus used the parable of the woman working the dough to liken yeast to the relentless action of the word of God to impact somebody to change their life. In fact, it could also represent the kingdom of heaven on earth — the church — in the sense of the slow but ongoing, permeating process by which the world would be impacted by God working through the church. But for the negative, Jesus likened yeast to the powerful destructiveness of evil — as personified by the lives of the Pharisees and Sadducees — and how it could likewise so powerfully impact people unless such evil was confronted and challenged.

***They discussed this among themselves and said, “It is because we didn’t bring any bread” — Matthew 16:7.***

Now the disciples heard Christ’s words concerning His warning about “the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees,” but mistook those words for something completely different. Like what had happened before in Christ’s ministry — for instance, with Nicodemus mistaking the spiritual process of “being born again” with meaning a second, physical birth through his mother, or with the Samaritan woman at the well mistaking the spiritual water Jesus was offering with the physical water available at a well dug by human hands — the disciples were totally missing the point that Jesus was trying to make. Of course, Jesus knew what they were talking about, and He responded — immediately and strongly.

***Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, “You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread?” — Matthew 16:8.***

Jesus was trying to have a teaching moment with these guys, but they all had their heads stuck in a bread factory someplace. You can almost see Him standing up in the boat and saying, “Enough. OK, oars up out of the water.” And hearing His tone, the disciples

immediately do as He commands. “Now listen up.” And as He continues, He absolutely has their attention. And from here on out, we’ll be combining Matthew with Mark to get the full brunt of what Jesus is saying — and how He is saying it.

***“Do you still not understand? . . . Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don’t you remember?”*** (In other words, to summarize, “Where have you guys been?”) — ***Jesus Christ, Matthew 16:9a; Mark 8:17b-18.***

“Now that I have your attention, listen up!”

***“Don’t you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? . . . When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?”*** “Twelve,” they replied — ***Jesus Christ, Matthew 16:9b; Mark 8:19.***

“Remember this, guys? I hope so; you all were there.”

***“Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? . . . And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?”*** They answered, “Seven” — ***Jesus Christ, Matthew 16:10; Mark 8:20.***

“Or how about this? Just a few days ago, right?”

***“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.”*** 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 — ***Matthew 16:11-12.***

“My point? I was there — both times. We began with hardly anything. But I was there. And everybody wound up going away completely satisfied, right — including you. So why are you worried about short supplies now? If I took care of you then, why should now be any different? Is my warranty up or something? I’ve taken care of you. I’ll always be taking care of you. So, there must be something more important than bread to be talking about now. Don’t you think?”

## **APPLICATION**

The Pharisees and Sadducees. The disciples. Obviously two very different groups: One was vehemently, eventually even murderously opposed to Christ; the other had left homes, job, and families, had left literally everything, to follow Him. Yet they both had something in common: Both groups grossly misread the works that Jesus had displayed.

The Pharisees and Sadducees, both sworn enemies of the Savior, misunderstood that the signs — the many, many miracles that Jesus performed — were intended to be the “sign from heaven” that they demanded; all of those amazing moments were meant to convey that God had indeed come to earth, and was residing here in human form — as Jesus of Nazareth. As He Himself said: ***“The works I do in My Father’s name testify about Me. . . . Do not believe Me unless I do the works of My Father. But if I do them, even though you do not believe Me (My words), believe the works, that you may know and understand that the Father is in Me, and I in the Father”*** — ***Jesus Christ, John 10:25b, 37-38.*** But

because they did not believe in Christ and believe who and what He was, they did not believe His signs.

Now when we consider the disciples, it was Christ's desire to talk with them about the incredible importance of countering false teachers and their words with the truth of the gospel, but that lesson had to be put on "pause" due to their own lack of understanding about what the miracles of Jesus really meant.

Not to understate it but speaking to "false teaching" is relatively simple. Anything that diminishes God the Father — His sovereignty, His "one-and-onlyness," His power, His perfection; anything that diminishes Jesus Christ — His deity, His humanity, His perfection, His death for our sins: anything that takes away anything from what God the Father and what Jesus Christ the Son are is false teaching. Anything that presents a "Jesus" who cannot save us from our sins is false teaching. Our authority on all this is Scripture.

But what of the disciples and their issue in the boat that day? That is what I want to address this morning more than anything. If the church fails, if Christianity somehow comes up short in our world today, it is not going to be due to a lack of education, or a lack of information. It is going to be the failure of one particular part of a Christian's life: Forgetting who's in the boat with us. You see, what the disciples overlooked that day was those recent events of the feeding of the 5,000 and then the feeding of the 4,000. Their food had been provided — by the guy in the boat with them. Miraculous by our standards, sure, but their needs had been met to the point of everyone who participated walking away satisfied.

What goes on in church today is, to put it simply, theology — the study of God. And like anything else driven by human efforts, theology has become very littered with very fancy, very long names and titles that I went to school for years to learn how to mispronounce. But what gets lost in all of that is that theology is at its heart meant to be a very practical ingredient in our lives.

Think about this: Jesus could have gone directly from heaven to the cross, let everybody know He was dying for our sins and, upon completing that, gone right back to heaven. But He didn't do that. Instead, He lived an entire life with us — from infancy to adulthood. And for the final 3+ years of that life, He walked and talked and healed and provided proofs of who He was and, most importantly, what a life connected to God looked like.

In bringing God to earth, by showing us God "in the flesh," so to speak, He also made God a very practical consideration and not just a religious or theological one. What did He talk about?

**1) "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" — Jesus Christ, Matthew 6:25-26.** What should you eat or drink? What should you wear? Those are very practical issues. Certainly, they were

practical issues in Jesus' day, for Jesus Himself. He had to eat, He had to drink, He had to have clothes to put on, and sandals to wear. We know He got tired; He slept like the dead in a storm out on the Sea of Galilee one time. He was fully human so He had all the same needs that anybody else fully human would have. But He also knew who He had with Him — His Father. Why should He worry about those things with a Heavenly Father like He had?

- 2) ***“Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life?” — Jesus Christ, Matthew 6:27.*** How much of our lives are filled with anxiety? Jesus is saying, “Hey, y’all; there’s another way.” The apostle Paul picked up on this idea in his letter to the church at Philippi: ***Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. . . . And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of His glory in Christ Jesus — Paul, Philippians 4:6-7, 19.*** Living without anxiety? What a wonderfully practical way to go through life.
- 3) And what about our mortal enemy Satan? Is there any practical advice there? Absolutely: ***“[Satan is] not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies” — Jesus Christ, John 8:44b.***

And after the gospels come the epistles of Paul and James and Peter, all written with more practical perspective on how to live: How to deal with the family structures of husband and wife, marriage and kids, how to deal with difficult relationships in the church, how to reconcile, how to restore. Those are all very practical.

The point of all this? Christianity is obviously about Christ's dying to wash us from our sins. That is a wonderful moment — justification — of being seen by God as if we are sinless. But from that moment on comes a lifetime — sanctification — of being molded and shaped into a life like Jesus lived. Jesus offers the life of His Father as a very practical life that meets all our needs because it met all His needs. And that is the life He wants us to present to the world — a life of joy sustained by knowing “who is in the boat with us.” “In Christ” means we are not alone, and never will be. What a wonderful way to live.

## **CONCLUSION**

As we close, is there anyone here who finds a struggle with this area, just remembering who has offered to be in the boat with us? Let's get that reckoned out so that you can begin to enjoy life the way your Savior intended. Let's pray!