

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

JULY 18TH-19TH, 2020 // BOOK OF MATTHEW

THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES (MATTHEW 16:1-4)

At this point in His earthly ministry, Jesus is teaching, preaching, and performing miracles in Gentile regions.

- In doing so, He challenged the Jewish orthodoxy of the day and was met with opposition from Jewish religious leaders.
- "The Pharisees & Sadducees came" (vs. 1)- these two groups were normally theological enemies, but were united by their hatred of Jesus.

PHARISEES

A conservative group who held to a strict observance of law & tradition and set themselves apart by their rigid devotion to God's law and their own interpretations of it.

SADDUCEES

A more liberal group from the predominantly wealthy class who only followed the Torah, and rejected entirely the supernatural, angels, heaven, hell, and the resurrection.

The Pharisees in Matthew's gospel are primarily marked by self-righteousness- superiority derived from a sense that their lifestyles & actions made them better than other people and holy in the sight of God.

- The Sadducees are marked by self-indulgence-pleasing themselves by the things of this world and creating a religion where they could adjust the rules to fit their own preferences, priorities, politics, and pursuits.
- BOTH entirely missed who Jesus is and opposed Him.

In both these groups we see a reflection of tendencies in our own hearts.

- We often fluctuate between self-indulgence and self-righteousness, and both tendencies miss Jesus and oppose His work in our lives.
- So this mixed group is waiting on the shoreline in Magadan (15:39) to test Jesus and demand from Him a "sign from heaven".

Jesus replied that His challengers had already been given plenty of proof- the deaf hear, the blind see, the dead are raised to life (Matt. 11:5)-but they refused to interpret the evidence.

- Why does Jesus start talking about weather? To reveal to them their own dishonesty and stubborn blindness-they could examine the weather and draw logical conclusions.

And yet, they would not examine the evidence Jesus had already given.

- They didn't lack evidence; they lacked honesty, humility, and a willingness to hear truth that challenged their own ideals.
- No sign will be given to them except for "the sign of Jonah" (vs. 4)- a reference to Jesus' resurrection. Their demand for a sign revealed the sad condition of their hearts.

They were "evil and adulterous" (vs. 4)- they weren't necessarily guilty of physical adultery.

- They were worshiping a false god they had created, because if they had been worshiping the true God, they would've recognized His son when He came.
- We're so guilty of doing the same thing and then wondering why we can't see God at work and demanding from Him blessings, answers, and proofs.

LEAVEN OF THE PHARISEES (MATTHEW 16:5-12)

Once again Jesus and His disciples board their boat and cross the lake.

- The disciples discover that they'd forgotten to bring any bread (vs. 5).
- Seeing this as a teachable moment, Jesus uses the metaphor of yeast (leaven) to warn His disciples against the teaching of the Pharisees & Sadducees.

In the Old Testament, yeast is a symbol of sin (Ex. 12:8, 15-20) in that sin has a pervasive, undercover influence, and yet its effects spread everywhere quickly and at an exponential rate.

- Paul warns the Corinthian church that "a little yeast leavens the whole batch" (1 Cor. 5:6).
- Like yeast in a lump of dough, sin & false teaching grow invisibly in the heart.

The disciples are a bit confused- they're still hung up on the fact that they don't have any physical bread (vs. 7).

- Jesus is visibly frustrated by the disciples' lack of spiritual insight AND their lack of trust in His provision.
- Had they already forgotten the 12 baskets leftover from the feeding of the 5,000 and the 7 leftover from the feeding of the 4,000 (vs. 8-10)?

They were apparently so preoccupied with their needs for physical provision and nourishment they weren't even thinking about their spiritual needs and the dangers associated with false teaching and sin.

- We do the same thing! We focus primarily on our physical well-being (by eating, resting, and working for them to care for), but we rarely audit our spiritual diet or health.

WHAT IS THE "LEAVEN OF THE PHARISEES & SADDUCEES"?

- On the surface, these two groups had little to nothing in common.
- However, both groups seemed to be entirely focused around "self"- self-righteousness (Pharisees) and self-indulgence (Sadducees).
- Both groups were opposed to Jesus because His message posed a threat to theirs.
- Beware of this self-centered, self-worshiping, self-promoting, and self-justifying teaching.

ON THIS ROCK (MATTHEW 16:13-20)

What was the conversation like on their trip to Caesarea Philippi?

- This Gentile district was 120 miles from Jerusalem in the northern part of Palestine and had been a center for Baal worship; at that time there were shrines to the Greek god Pan and the emperor Augustus Caesar.
- It would've been a place of pagan sacrifices, cult rituals, debauchery, and idols.

It's in this place- surrounded by idols, monuments, and temples for worship of pagan gods- that Jesus asks His followers a two-part question.

- "Who do people say the Son of Man is?" (vs. 13)-the disciples respond with a list of prophets, from John the Baptist to Elijah to Jeremiah.
- The crowds knew that Jesus had to have some kind of spiritual authority and power, but they were all a bit confused about His identity.

The "people" today are no different- popular opinion of our day is that Jesus was a good man, a spiritual teacher, or a good example sent from God for us to follow.

- Unfortunately, many of us get our spiritual knowledge and convictions simply by taking a poll of what people around us are saying.
- But the viewpoints of a crowd can never be a substitute for personal beliefs.

So Jesus asks a more direct and pointed question- "Who do you say that I am?" (vs. 15)

- Notice that Jesus didn't ask the disciples who they thought or believed He was.
- He wanted to know who they said He was- if they were ready to verbally confess His identity- if we're not willing to commit to go public with our faith, it's dead (James 2:17).

Simon, prompted by a revelation from God, speaks for the 12 as He confesses that Jesus is "...the Christ, the Son of the living God" (vs. 16).

- They're surrounded by symbols of dead, pagan religion to lifeless, manmade gods.
- Simon Peter's profession is that Jesus is only true living God who is the promised Messiah.
- Jesus responds with an amazing announcement.

As Peter responds to Jesus' identity, Jesus reveals to Peter his identity within the kingdom.

- "You are Petros ("rock"), and on this petra ("rock") I will build my church" (vs. 18).
- Jesus prophesied of Peter's role as leader and spokesperson within the early Church.
- But it could also be taken to mean that Peter's confession would be the foundational truth of the Church.

This "Church" (ekklesia, "gathering of called out ones") founded on the rock would be unstoppable- even the gates of hell won't be able to stop it (vs. 18).

- "The gates of hell" is a Jewish idiom for the powers of death.
- Death could not stop the Messiah, death could not stop His messengers, and the Church wouldn't die out over time like other movements.

The true Church is built on the reality that Jesus is the conqueror of death in that He disarmed its power by paying for our sin on the cross.

- Jesus further empowers the leaders of His Church by giving them the "keys of the kingdom of heaven" and the responsibility of "binding and loosing" (forbidding or permitting).
- This is Jesus granting them divine authority as His representatives.

When Peter or the other apostles (or any follower of Jesus) proclaimed the true gospel, it was done under Jesus' authority based on His Word.

- As long as we stand on the "rock" of Jesus' identity, His gospel, and His Word, this authority has been entrusted to us as the Church to proclaim this message.
- And we have a promise that NOTHING can stop the Church from her mission!

Our Identity- we seem to be obsessed with the concept of identity and finding ourselves.

But when we focus so heavily on our own identities and best versions of self, we tend to be self-righteous, self-indulgent, self-centered, and self-worshiping. (Matt. 10:39)

When the central question of your identity stops being, "who am I to the world?" and instead becomes, "who is Jesus to me?"...that's when you find life AND an identity.

Everybody Loses when We Fight the Wrong Battle.