

Matthew 21-04-18a

Good morning. Welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. The vast throngs assembled before me and the countless multitudes of you tuning in from afar.

It's a beautiful Sunday morning and we have a wonderful passage of Scripture before us in Matthew chapter 16. Matthew chapter 16, we continue our study of the life, the words, the actions of the Lord Jesus. It just doesn't get any better than this, looking directly at the perfect Son of God and His revelation in person to us, recorded in four Gospels.

We get that unique perspective and nowhere is it more fully revealed than the passage we are going to look at this morning. We'll take a moment to ask God's blessing on our fellowship and on our study and we will begin. Father, we are so grateful for the time in which we live, the challenges that face us, the circumstances that you have woven into the fabric of your plan and our lives to enable us to grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

We are privileged to have the full revelation of your plan and purpose in the pages of Scripture, which is before us with unprecedented clarity and access. And we pray this morning as we look at this episode from the life of your Son, the Lord Jesus, that your Holy Spirit will minister it to our hearts, impress it on our memories and on our spirits, enable us to recall it and see its pertinence and its application to our own lives in the time remaining to us in this life. We pray it in Jesus' name, Amen.

Matthew chapter 16. You will remember that we undertook the beginning of this chapter last time with the Pharisees and the Sadducees. You remember the primary characteristics of those two groups.

Who are the Pharisees? What are they noted for? They are conservative, they are ritualistic, they are religious, and they are hypocrites. Woe to you, scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites, hypocrisy, whitewashed tombstones, wiping the outside of the dish, corrupt on the inside, an appearance of righteousness, an appearance that is gauged and geared to impress other Pharisees and the people around them. That's the Pharisees.

Who are the Sadducees? Why are they so sad, you see? They are the opposite. They're the liberals. They are the rationalizers.

They don't believe in the invisible. They don't believe in resurrection. They don't believe in spirits.

They don't believe in angels. They like the Word of God as a sort of a vague moral guide, but they're at the opposite end of the spectrum. And it is highly significant that as we come to this portion of Matthew's Gospel, we see them under a single article, then the

Pharisees and Sadducees.

Because as widely divergent, this is like the Democrats and Republicans. This is like the Socialists and the Capitalists coming together in a common cause to fight a common enemy. And they both come because they both see Jesus as a significant threat to the status quo.

And even though they are normally at bitter odds with one another, they come together. And we're going to see this togetherness again in the words of the Lord Jesus this morning. And it's very interesting to figure out what it is Jesus is referring to.

The disciples completely fail, and we want to try to do better. We've already got the wrong answer before us, and so we want to improve on that. But you'll remember that the Pharisees and Sadducees came and were testing him, peradzo.

This is the same word that is used of us being tested. This is not dokimadzo. This is not testing for the purpose of approval.

This is not going to the assayer and ensuring that something is as valuable as you think. This is not taking your jewelry to the jeweler to ascertain that it is in fact 24 karat gold or 18 karat gold. Peradzo is, I want to find out if this is going to hold up under duress.

This is stress testing. This is what we did at the Naval Academy. I'll never forget.

I'm sure all of this technology is long gone. But in the primitive dark days of the Middle Ages when I went to school, they were talking to us about metals and about alloys and about what you make ships out of. And to test the properties of various alloys, generally steel alloys that you make, you know, naval things out of, they would get a precisely sized little stick of this metal.

It was rectangular. It was a couple of inches long. And if you looked at it from the end, it was square.

If you looked at it from the side, it was a rectangle. So kind of like a square piece of chalk, if you will. And there was a groove, a precisely scribed groove halfway down one of the long sides.

Then they had a machine with a big heavy-duty gripper above and a gripper below. And you'd put this little plug of metal in there and grip it tightly and then turn the machine on and it would start drawing the two grippers apart. And there was a measure of the amount of force that was being used to pull on this little plug.

And you would turn it up and up and up and it would be so many hundreds of pounds or so many thousands of pounds of drawing force until that little groove would engender a crack and the thing would separate. And this was the tensile strength. How strong is it

when you pull on it? How much weight can it hold even with this little crack? Well, that's peradzo.

It's not ascertaining something that you're sure is valuable and you just want to know how valuable it is. The trial of our faith is often dokimadzo. God is testing it to demonstrate its value.

Peradzo is more testing to see if you can make it crack. Sometimes we are peradzo. James talks about this, you know, not letting a man when he's peradzo think that God is peradzoing, trying to tear him down, trying to make him crack.

Our testing is of a different sort. We display our faith. We manifest our faith to God's glory.

But they have come to peradzo. They want to see if they can entangle the Lord Jesus, if they can embarrass him, if they can cause the people to find fault. So you remember this from last time.

Show us a sign from heaven. You've done these earthly signs, healings and such. That's not good enough.

We need a better sign. We need a sign from heaven. Do what Joshua did and make the sun stand still.

Call down fire from heaven as in the days of Elijah. We need something bigger. And this puts me in mind of a quote by Voltaire, and I'm quoting loosely because I don't speak French.

But Voltaire, you remember he's a famous skeptic, and he was fascinated by the scriptures and by the concept of God. And he wrote a lot about it and said a lot about it. But kind of like Thomas Jefferson, who thought he would chop up the Bible and just keep the morality and cut out all of the supernatural stuff, Voltaire said this, and it is indicative of the attitude of so many people, especially in this day.

Voltaire said, look, even if a miracle was performed in the open marketplace and witnessed by a thousand people, I would rather doubt my senses than believe the miracle. Open marketplace, a thousand witnesses, miracle accomplished. I would rather doubt my senses than acknowledge that an actual miracle took place.

This is the attitude of the Pharisees. They see Lazarus walking around after being down in the grave for four days. And what do they want to do? Well, let's kill him.

And the guy that raised him. This life from the dead thing has to be stamped out. And you can see the union of the threat to the hypocritical Pharisees who have their own definition of righteousness.

We've got a lot of people running around today defining righteousness for us. That's what the Pharisees did in their day. The Sadducees are the rationalists, and they don't believe in the supernatural.

So we've got to undercut, undermine, anything that would point to the divine God with whom the people of Israel are supposed to be in covenant relationship. So Jesus says, It's a wicked and adulterous generation that seeks a sign. Now you think, but hasn't God used signs all through the Old Testament? Wasn't it signs in Egypt? Didn't God give signs to authenticate prophets and to manifest the authority of the message that came and so on? People were raised from the dead in the Old Testament.

Elijah and Mount Carmel is our previous example. So what's the matter with there being signs? Here's the difference. In the days and in the times, both Old Testament and New, where signs were given for God's purpose, the rainbow was put in the heaven, it is an oath, it says in the Old Testament, O-T or O-T-H.

It's a sign. The sun and the moon are given for the signs of the seasons and the days and the years. Who asked for the sun and the moon? Who asked for the plagues of Egypt? Who asked for any of the signs? Now there have been wonderful miracles.

Joshua asked for the sun to stand still so he could finish whipping the Canaanites. There have been requests made to God for supernatural healing, for the prophets raising the dead and so on. But in terms of a sign that is given as a marker of God's authority, of God's man, of God's message, when did anyone ever ask for those? Signs are not evil.

A generation that seeks a sign and wants a sign, wants God to confirm on my terms, at my behest, I want God to prove something by my standards. God will prove things according to his own standards, in his own way and in his own time. We see the sign.

We interpret the sign. We believe based on these signs. We don't ask for a sign.

Now, can you think of somebody who asked for a sign and got it? My favorite image of this man is trying to thresh grain indoors so that he's not seen by the enemy. And he's all covered in grass seeds and he's trying to separate the grain from the chaff. And the chaff is sticking to him because he's sweating because he's inside and he doesn't have the breeze.

And an angel of God comes to him and says, Hail, you mighty man of God. This is the guy who's later on going to take clay jars and pitchers and 300 guys. And remember Gideon? When God says you're going to be the means of my deliverance in the days of the judges.

What did Gideon do? I need a sign. Let me put out a fleece. And you remember the whole thing of the fleece.

And the first sign is not good enough. Remember that? Put the fleece out. I want the ground to be dry and the fleece to be wet.

The other time he wants to forget the order. He wants the ground to be wet and the fleece to be dry. And you think as long as you're asking for a sign from heaven, how about a second sun to cross the sky or a flight of angels to sing me to my rest or something spectacular.

He just says, I'm going to put a skin out tomorrow morning. I want to see one thing wet and the other thing dry. And so we have precedent.

But is this a good thing? Is this a model we should follow? Should we be putting out the fleece? If you read the later history of Gideon, you find out that God uses what is available. But because God uses a thing, doesn't mean that thing is doing what it's supposed to. Look at Jehu.

God uses Jehu as a scourge and a purge. But Jehu is a rascal. Gideon is a rascal.

The prophet Balaam is a rascal and ends up being taken out by God. Samson is a rascal. Good illustration.

So just because somebody does a thing in scripture, when we went through the book of Acts and we looked at the apostle Paul, was it right for him to go down to the temple and take a vow and supply sacrifices for Nazarites who are supposed to biblically supply their own sacrifice? And to pay for it, he used the money that was collected from the Gentiles for the Jerusalem church? No, that is not right. And just because the apostle Paul does a thing, doesn't mean it's right. He's not Jesus.

The only person you can look at and know that every single thing he did and every single thing he said was right is the Lord Jesus Christ. So that's why Jesus says in verse four, it is a wicked and an adulterous generation that seeks a sign. A non-wicked and non-adulterous generation will see the signs and believe.

Belief doesn't need confirmation for its foundation. Belief gets confirmation after it is expressed. Belief comes first.

This is what the Calvinists constantly miss. When Jesus says, to you it has been given to understand the mysteries of the kingdom, but to those outside, it's in parables. The reason is the belief of the disciples came first.

That's why they're down at the Jordan watching John baptized. That's why when John says, this is the Lamb of God, they say, where are you staying? Can we come with you? That's why they follow him to Cana. That's why they stick with him and abandon their families and their businesses because they believe.

Now this becomes important because this morning in the second session, we are going to be looking at the great confession. The great confession. It's coming up in our chapter.

So if you need God to prove something before you're going to believe, that's wicked and adulterous. And so we looked at that last time. If you remember when we went to, I don't know where my piece of paper is, but we went back to Isaiah and we went to Jeremiah last time and looked at where the brood of vipers phrase comes from and the characteristics of the people that were described in those chapters and in those days, their attitude of unbelief, their attitude of self-centeredness, living in the paneled houses, right? So, no sign shall be given to it except the sign of Jonah.

And we saw that Jesus has told them this earlier. He already told them that they were going to get the sign of Jonah and he explained what the sign of Jonah was. He doesn't explain it here because they are no longer even listening.

They are not teachable. It's wasted words. And then look at the last phrase in verse 4 where it says, he left them and departed.

There are two different words that are used when it says Jesus left, Jesus departed, Jesus went away. One of them is just the common word for going out and, you know, moving to a different location. This particular expression is a different Greek verb and it has a sense of finality.

It is used for abandoning a thing. I'm leaving and not returning. And it says, he left them and departed.

This means he's finished. He's done trying to speak any truth to the Pharisees and the Sadducees. They're adamant.

They've got a marble heart, a granite head, and talking to them is a waste of time. So Jesus just says, you know, wicked and adulterous generation seeks a sign. You're getting the sign of Jonah.

And he leaves. Doesn't explain it. Doesn't amplify it.

And you remember that this earlier material isn't there. He answered and said to them, wicked and adulterous generation. He doesn't talk about the weather here.

This is later additions to Matthew. So now we're in verse 5. Now, when his disciples had come to the other side, they had forgotten to take bread. Now it's important to understand what it means by when they had come to the other side.

You remember they came to the region of Magadan back in verse 39. And Magadan is on the Eastern, I'm sorry, the Western shore of the Sea of Galilee. So from the Capernaum Nazareth Northern region, they had sailed across to Magadan.

Now the East, the Western side of the Sea of Galilee is well populated. There's it's dotted with villages. It's part of the fertile Valley area there.

And you can go anywhere and find bread. There's no need to pack a lunch. If you go to the Western side of the Sea of Galilee, heavily populated, lots of commerce, lots of stuff available to purchase or to have donated by friendlies.

But when it says they crossed to the other side, verse 5, the other side is the Eastern shore. The Eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee, heading over into the region of Decapolis and so on is much more barren and sparsely populated in these days. And if you're going to go there, you'd better pack a lunch because there is no availability.

Much as availability of bread was a problem in the feeding of the 5,000 and later the feeding of the 4,000. Two different locations. So they've come to the Eastern shore and they've forgotten to bring bread.

And when they got to the shore, Jesus says to them, take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Same construction as you have in verse 1 of this chapter where a single article lumps the Pharisees and Sadducees together. And you think, well, now, wait a minute.

I already know that the leaven is not just talking about stuff you put in dough, that it's something that they think, something that they practice, but they are so widely diverse. The Pharisees, hyper-religious, ritualistic, holier than thou, hypocritical, conservators of the law, adding all of this great hedge around the law that you can't brush your robe more than a couple of times or you're working on the Sabbath. Your disciples are harvesting because they're pulling heads of grain on the Sabbath.

How dare you heal this on the Sabbath? This is all Pharisees. Sadducees, laissez faire. If it feels good, do it.

You know, try to be a nice person, but eat, drink, and be merry. Tomorrow we die and it's all over. They rationalize.

They're materialistic. They're hedonistic. They're self-gratifying.

And they like having power and influence. That's why they work in the priestly areas, and they are supporters of Herod. The Herodians are Sadducees, and the Sadducees are Herodians.

And they believe in going along to get along, and they're working their political and civil power with a thin veneer of belief in God. Because they would have no power with the people if they didn't acknowledge God and the validity of the prophets and so on. But they say, well, you know, you've got to spiritualize all of this.

In the material world, you've got to be practical. You've got to use your common sense. Common sense tells you this whole invisible thing and appealing to invisible spirits and angels and God Himself is kind of a waste of time.

So they are like our most liberal wings of Christianity today that say, you know, you can't take the Bible literally. Just use it as a moral guide. You know, be kind, do unto others, golden rule.

That's about it. But when you lump them together, and Jesus is going to say, beware the leaven. What is that? They're so radically different.

What is it that we're supposed to beware of? Well, the disciples haven't quite deciphered leaven, and they were just talking among themselves and saying, well, so let's have lunch. And they start looking around, and if you go to Mark chapter 8, there is one little forlorn loaf of bread in the boat. There's 13 people in the boat, and they've got the makings for one sandwich.

So then Jesus says, beware the leaven, and they're looking around at each other, and they're looking at this little forlorn tortilla, and they're thinking, you know how the Lord does. He doesn't speak directly, and when He's talking about leaven, He's chewing us out for not bringing the bread. And the Lord Jesus, being aware of this, says to them, O you of little faith.

Now, we can stop right here. We're so enmeshed in circumstances. We're so caught up in the details of our lives, and when there's a challenge, when there's a shortfall, when something's not going according to plan, we immediately think in material terms.

It's just our instinct. We are made of mud. Dust we are, unto dust we return, and we think in dusty terms.

So when physical things challenge us, we immediately think, all of us do this. I temporarily fixed a window blind that wouldn't stay up by sticking a toothpick in the knob that controls it to hold it in place. Physical problem, physical solution.

We just do this all the time. Hair's out of place, grab a brush, grab a comb, get some spray, put on a hat. Physical problem, physical solution.

So the disciples are caught up in this physical problem, and it is a problem, because they've gone to a barren region where there is no bread, and Jesus speaks a word of spiritual truth, and you think, well, isn't this good? The disciples are making an application. They're trying to apply the word of God to their immediate circumstance, and in doing so, this is the scary part. Isn't it a scary thought that we're in a physical circumstance, we hear the word of God, and we immediately try to make a physical application to the moment, instead of stopping to consider what is the word of God actually addressing? Am I looking for a band-aid for the moment, or am I listening via the

Holy Spirit and the word of God that I've imbibed in the past to something bigger, something larger, something in the spiritual realm, and am I distracting myself by looking at this circumstance? This is what the disciples do, squabbling among themselves, so I thought you were going to bring the bread.

Well, you know, you had the bag, and what's in there? Well, I've got an extra pair of sandals. Well, look, down under the sandals, you've got one piece of bread. What are we supposed to eat? You're the guy that's in charge this week and they're just squabbling.

They're looking for bread. Jesus says, and I think Jesus did this on purpose. He was aware that they had brought no bread, and so he tests them.

How much have you grown? How much have you learned? How much can you lift yourself out of the immediate, the short-term, the visible, the shallow, and think in spiritual terms? So the Pharisees and Sadducees were perazzoing Jesus. Jesus is dokimanzoing his disciples. He says, look, we're getting near the end of the line here.

Hopefully you've learned something in these past years and traveling around and going out and invoking the power of the Spirit to cast out demons and heal the sick and raise the dead and so on, to rely on God for your provision. Don't take an extra stick. Don't take any bread.

Don't take an extra pair of sandals. Go out. God will provide via faithful people in the villages that you go to.

And if there's not somebody there, shake the dust off your feet and go to another place. If there's somebody faithful enough to take you in and supply your needs, that's where you preach. If they don't, shake off the dust and go someplace where there are receptive people with a generous heart who recognize who and what you are and the message that you bring.

Don't let physical provision get in the way of your message, your ministry, your purpose. So did you learn that lesson when I sent you out? Lord, we did this, that, and the other. And Jesus says, well, I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning.

But do you remember the lesson? So they brought no bread. So Jesus says, beware, take heed. Two warnings.

You've got to be cautious. You've got to take heed, pay attention, look out for this. Two different words for caution.

Take heed and beware. This will slip up on you if you're not careful. It will overtake you if you're not watchful.

Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. They've got two of

those there. There's only one in the original.

The Pharisees and Sadducees. They've got a common leaven. Now, I want to read you something right quick.

I hadn't read this when we did the earlier, remember the parable of the woman who hid leaven in three measures of meal? And I felt like I was alone in the world and out at the end of a long set of tracks into the unbroken snow when I said, I don't think this is a good thing. The leaven in the measures of meal, I don't think this is good. I was so gratified.

I was digging through and getting some books out of a box and I found Notes on Matthew by H.A. Ironside. This was published back in 1948 and I didn't read any of this until this past week when I was studying. I thought, well, I wonder what Ironside's got to say.

And so we're talking about leaven. So I went back to Matthew 13 where Jesus talked about the woman who hid leaven because what does this leaven mean? What is the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees? It's not what kind of bread did we bring in the boat, right? It's something else. This is what Ironside says and it's so great, I just have to read it to you.

So he's in the section where Jesus has told the parable. It is that of the leaven hidden in the meal. Perhaps of all the teachings of the Lord, nothing has been more misunderstood than this.

He said, The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till the whole was leavened. The general idea among Christians is that the woman here represents the church, the three measures of meal, the world, the leaven is the gospel, as a result of which the whole world will be converted eventually. Nothing could be more contrary to the teaching of the Word of God than this.

It is a solemn fact that after nearly 20 centuries of gospel preaching, there are more unbelievers in the world today than there were when Christ commissioned the apostles to go forth and evangelize the nations. Scripture nowhere warrants us to expect to see a converted world before the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ. In order to understand this parable, one needs to inquire as to the meaning of leaven.

What does leaven mean? Throughout the Word of God, leaven is used always in an evil sense. Of old, the people of Israel were to put all leaven out of their houses during the Passover season and the apostle Paul explains this when he says, Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us. He's quoting 1 Corinthians 5, 7 and 8. Paul says, Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us, therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness.

Paul understands what leaven represents. When Jesus says leaven, what is he talking

about? What do the Pharisees and Sadducees have in common? Malice and wickedness. It doesn't matter which side of the political fence or the social fence or the religious fence, the denominational fence they are, what leaven do they have in common? Malice and wickedness.

The wickedness can express itself in different ways. Self-righteousness, laissez-faire, immorality, whatever it might be. Malice and wickedness, 1 Corinthians 5, 7 and 8. Let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, not with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Sincerity means genuine faith, pure dedication to God, looking out for those two great commandments, love the Lord your God, love one another. Sincerity and truth. Leaven then speaks of malice and wickedness and the Christian is to put this out of his life.

The Lord Jesus warned his disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy and self-righteousness. Remember the Pharisees, hypocrisy and self-righteousness. The leaven of the Sadducees, which is false doctrine and materialism.

And the leaven of Herod, which is worldliness and political corruption. In the book of Leviticus, we have the meal offering. This is chapter 2 of Leviticus.

In which there was to be no leaven. This represents our Lord Jesus Christ's humanity, which was absolutely without sin. In the parable, the woman is surreptitiously hiding the leaven in the meal offering.

The three measures of meal certainly do not represent the world, but rather the truth of God concerning His Son. The woman is not the church as such, but is the false church. That woman Jezebel, of whom we read in Revelation 2.20, who calls herself a prophetess and teaches the servants of God unholy principles, which are subversive of the faith.

Subversive of the faith. Is not this exactly what has been taking place during the past almost two millennia of church history? The mystery of iniquity began to work in apostolic days and it has spread throughout the centuries until today there is practically no great doctrine of scripture that has not been perverted by false teachers. And I say amen to that.

So, we've got a better idea of what the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees is. We're going to pause here and take our break. But by way of application, how did the disciples miss this wonderful, important, critical, double warning truth from the Lord Jesus? How did they miss it? What is our definition of subjectivity? Eyes on self, eyes on people, eyes on circumstances.

What are they doing in the boat? Who forgot to bring the bread? We haven't got any bread. It wasn't my fault that we didn't bring bread. Somebody else didn't bring the bread.

We have forgotten to bring bread. Eyes on self. What am I going to do for lunch? Eyes on people.

Somebody's to blame for no chow. Eyes on circumstances. We forgot to bring the bread.

And there's no place to buy it over here on the eastern shore. And focusing on those things, the Lord Jesus has delivered a critically important, massively important truth and it's sailed right over their heads. We cannot afford to make this mistake.

Awareness, situational awareness is great, but not to the extent that it clouds our minds and blurs our vision to the spiritual realities that the Lord Jesus is emphasizing over and over and over. It's like we saw Thursday night. Are you looking at the building or are you looking at the presence of God that the building represents, that the building facilitates, that the building symbolizes? Are you looking at the externalities or are you looking at the realities? Failing to see the invisible realities, that's the leaven of the Sadducees, that's the leaven of the Pharisees, that's the leaven of Herod.

And we need to beware and take heed that it doesn't start leavening our lives. Let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to see the conclusion of this discourse and then Jesus is going to ask a question.

Who do men say that I am? It's really fascinating. We'll see that when we come back.