

August 9, 2009

HEART-HEALTHY DIET
MATTHEW 16.1-12

The disciples of Christ are to beware of falling into same way of thinking and living as the Pharisees and Sadducees who expect the kingdom of heaven to be inaugurated in such a way that will avoid the cross.

1. THE DEVILISH DESIRE FOR A SIGN (1-4)

The Pharisees and Sadducees testing Jesus (1): Differences between Pharisees (P) and Sadducees (S) were deep and serious. P's believed Law and Prophets; S's accepted on the books of Moses. P's believed in angels and demons; S's did not. P's believed in resurrection of the dead; S's did not (cf. Mt 22.23ff; also Ac 23.7-8). P's antagonistic toward Rome; S's friendly toward Rome.

They have something in common here: they both hate Jesus. They are co-belligerents.

"Test him" - looks back to 4.1ff where Jesus was *tested* by the devil. Connection between P & S and the devil. They have a common agenda: testing Jesus in order to get him to stray from the course of his mission. (But note Peter later in 16.23 as well.)

"A sign from heaven" (1): (Cf. 12.22ff.) Sign = *extraordinary works that proclaim or announce the deliverance of God's people.* Signs are God's way of actually bringing about the deliverance of his people. Note the plagues in Egypt as "signs and wonders."

Not merely pointers (although they have that function as well). They are acts of power through which God enacts the deliverance of his people. In the signs which deliver he is also announcing this deliverance.

What then were the P & S asking for? They are asking for Jesus to do something that would prove that he was the Son of David, the Messiah, the king of Israel. The act would be the effective sign that would bring about the deliverance of Israel.

The desire for a sign corresponded to what the devil wanted Jesus to do: grasp for the kingdom prematurely and w/o death.

Israel doesn't want to die. The problem with this is that sin cannot be dealt with and defeated by any other means other than death. Sin, the root of all the evil of earthly kingdoms, can only be defeated if it is first submitted to and endured and the penalty is completely exhausted.

Discerning the face of heaven (2-3): The signs were all around (like in ch. 12). They just couldn't discern them.

Jesus turns to their ability to discern the sky (also can be trans. "heaven"). Sky/Heaven = firmament created on 2nd day to separate waters above from waters beneath. Above the firmament/heaven is God's throne (Ezek 1).

Certainly does refer to everyday forecasts of the weather. But also the sky/heaven tells a larger story (see Ps 19). Along with the Scriptures they ought to see correlations between the activity in the sky/heaven and God's activity.

They ought to know when God's glory cloud that is full of red/fire/light is with them and is threatening and when it is not. They ought to be able to discern the signs of the face of heaven given in Christ and see the signs of fair weather (i.e. if they follow him) and signs of foul weather (i.e. if they disobey him).

There are signs all around them that God's deliverance is taking place: feedings, exorcisms, healings, teachings, etc. The problem is not the lack of signs but lack of discernment to read the signs correctly.

The sign of Jonah (4): (cf. 12.38ff.) "wicked and adulterous generation" - Dt 1.35; 32.5, 20; children of Israel were delivered from Egypt with great *signs* and wonders. They refused to believe and grumbled, testing God in the wilderness.

Another parallel in Hosea 3.1. Hosea is a contemporary of Jonah. Hosea loved a "wicked and adulterous" woman (representing the harlotries of Israel herself). Israel rejected her husband.

Same thing is happening here. YHWH, the husband, has come in the flesh and Israel is rejecting him.

Their sign-seeking is what makes them this way. They are refusing to believe what they have been given.

Sign of Jonah: deals with Jesus being in the tomb 3 days and 3 nights like Jonah was in the belly of the sea monster (cf. Mt

12.38ff.). Jonah = a prophet to Northern kingdom of Israel; told to go preach to Ninevites (Assyria) that they would be destroyed.

Jonah knew that God would be merciful (cf. Jon 4.1ff.). God would turn his affection to another nation (1) in fulfillment of Abrahamic promise and (2) to make Israel jealous so that they would repent.

Jonah = Israel cast into the sea and swallowed by the fish; i.e., Israel would go into exile to the Gentile nations. But even through Israel's rebellion her mission was being completed (e.g. pagan sailors being converted).

"The sign of Jonah the prophet" = in part that Israel lives under the threat of impending, imminent judgment. They are on the cusp of being swallowed up by the Gentiles, which in this case will be the Romans.

Jesus' resurrection will be *the* sign of the deliverance of God's people *and* the destruction of those who rebel (cp. 24.30).

2. BEWARE OF LEAVEN (5-12)

The disciples take no bread (5-7): Jesus has gone through the testing alone. Now his disciples join him (cp. 4.1ff.).

Pattern in Scripture: the head goes through things first and then the body follows. Jesus endures testing and death first and alone, but then his people are called to follow him in testing and death. This sets the stage for what Jesus is about to tell them.

Why is it such a big deal that they forgot bread? Not a big deal to Jesus, but it seems to put the disciples in a place like Israel of old who suffers hunger and b/c of it is in a position to complain that they have no bread. Disciples have the potential to fall into same trap as P & S (and Israel of old) becoming discontent with present situation, God's agenda (cp 16.23).

Maybe they thought that since they were supposed to feed people (as they did on the previous two occasions) they should have brought bread. If they don't have bread, how will they feed people?

Not bread but leaven (8-12): "O you of little faith!" Cp. Peter in 14.21. Cp. also Gentiles who have great faith in 15.28; 8.10.

Why does he characterize them as "little-faith" people? Well, from what he says about the feedings, it seems that he is rebuking their relative unbelief that he can provide bread. They have experienced Jesus' provision recently on two occasions.

But also goes to the realities of the kingdom itself. Jesus wants them to work out some conclusions from the parabolic nature of the feedings. They need to discern the signs (unlike the P & S are doing).

God is creating his army and bringing them out of Egypt ("5 in a rank" in Ex 13.18). 2nd feeding - bringing whole world to feast.

Jesus will provide the bread for these distinct yet inseparable kingdom ministries. He will provide the bread they need to give.

"Leaven of P & S" - their teachings; gets to fundamental realities of the nature of the kingdom. The common link is their agreement on the shape of the Messianic mission and, thus, the shape the kingdom ought to take with regards to the present political landscape.

This was ultimately a battle of words: the word of the Father in the Son v. the word of man & serpent (cf. Jesus' answer in Mt 4).

Will they allow the leavening words of the P & S to infiltrate their hearts and shape the way they think and live in terms of the kingdom agenda, or will they follow Jesus? Allowing them to linger for a while they will begin to make more sense.

The leaven of the P & S must be treated like the leaven of Egypt that must be cut off. Mt has presented Israel and her present leadership as Egypt in the opening of his Gospel. The P & S are associated with that leaven and their teachings must be cut off so that new leaven, the leaven of the kingdom that Jesus spoke about in his parables, can start a new loaf.

But if the disciples are not careful, they will give up Jesus' kingdom agenda for what appears to be an easier way and a way to get where they want in a quicker fashion.

1. We must be careful and discerning about the teachings to which we submit ourselves.