

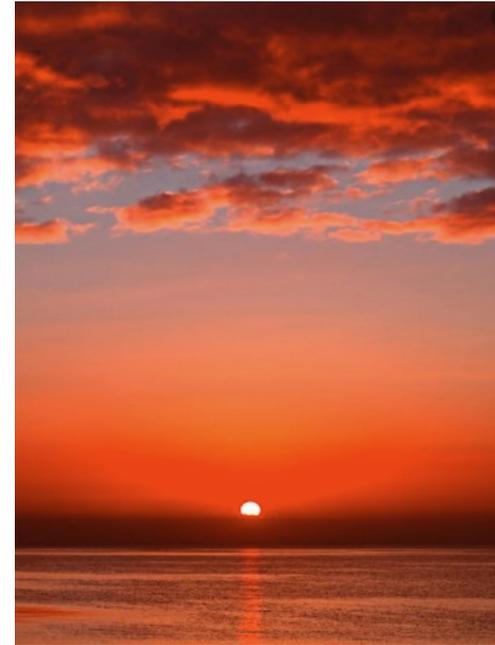
Gospel of Matthew

16:1-12

No Further Sign



Our text today is another example of the many hard saying of Jesus. It begins with the religious leaders coming to Jesus and asking to perform for them. I would assume this was a new batch of men who had journeyed from Jerusalem who had heard the stories about what Jesus could do, but had not personally seen it being done. They wanted to see it with their own eyes. But the groups that had come before this group *had* seen with their own eyes and still found excuses not to believe! Remember they claimed it was tricks, or that He was utilizing the power of Satan! Of course, that angered Jesus greatly! It was when He spoke of the unpardonable sin! He said if a person attributed the works of the Holy Spirit to Satan it was an unforgivable act in the eyes of God! In other words, you could beg God for forgiveness and not get it!



This group came and wanted a sign, and Jesus turned them down flat, but not without explaining first. He spoke of how everyone read the signs in the atmosphere for good or bad weather in this case, a red western sky at sunset. *I remember my mom quoting an old saying that I suspect has been around for many, many generations – “*Red sky at night, sailor’s delight. Red sky in the morning, sailor’s warning*” I’m sure they had a similar rule of thumb, conventional wisdom that said the same thing, that the people of this time and place went by also

But there actually is science behind this saying. When there is a red sky toward sunset, this means light from the setting sun is streaming through an atmosphere that has more than usual share of dust particles. This generally indicates high pressure or dry weather that is coming from the west, because the dust has not been cleaned from the air by the cleansing effect of rain. It is a general rule that works more often than not, but is not a sure thing!

Jesus says to his tormentors – “*You know very well how to read the weather, and are in tune with the signs of approaching weather, so why didn’t you read the signs that the Messiah was coming – that I was coming?!*” Jesus thought it should be as plain as the signs of approaching weather. It actually wasn’t that easy, but Jesus was scolding them mainly for their hard and unbelieving hearts. It wasn’t that they didn’t want the Messiah to come, and were not looking for His coming. They actually were, I think. It was just that they didn’t want it to be Jesus! Jesus was an inconvenient Messiah. He was not what they had expected! He was not the conventional understanding of what the Messiah would be like! But He was very, very smart, He pleased the people, and thus was very popular! If He suddenly went political He could turn into a real threat very quickly – a threat because they didn’t like Him and He did not like or respect them. They were enemies!



All of this does not mean that Jesus did not love these men (*Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem,..*). If any one of them had turned to Him in faith He would have gladly welcomed them into His company of disciples. He did not wish them harm. It was they who were bringing harm to their own selves! Jesus taught His disciple to not hate their enemies, but more than that – way more – He taught them to *love* their enemies, and it is apparent that He practiced what He preached. He did not exclude His enemies from His Kingdom. If anyone was excluded, they had excluded themselves! They kept their distance! They menaced Jesus and opposed Him! They found alternative explanations for the unexplainable miracles Jesus did a hundred times a day or more! It you ever hear anyone utter the objection that God cannot be a God of love if He sends people to Hell, know that God is not sending them anywhere! He invited theme to come to Him and escape Hell. But, alas, they won’t come. So people take themselves to Hell! God will not accompany them on that road except to join them occasionally to invite them to turn around and join Him in *HIS* Kingdom!

Likewise, how could they know that Jesus was a sure thing?! They couldn't, of course, but the things He did, the great miracles, should have granted Him a fair hearing in their minds. But it didn't! That was the thing – Jesus is complaining that no matter *how great* the signs and wonders He performed, there was no way to break through and get them to consider that He was the Messiah!



So, when He was asked once again for a sign that He was the Messiah, He refused to perform for them! It was not that He would do no more miracles, but He would not do it when these religious leaders were peering over his shoulder trying to figure out how He was doing these “*tricks*” – how He was “*fooling the people*”!

*If you have ever tried to change someone's mind on face book or on a blog site, you'll know how impossible it is. You can bring it with devastating clarity and reason and when your are done, and they have no rebuttal, they'll start calling you names – white male privilege, white supremacist, misogynist, Islamophobe, homophobe, and about 10 other of their favorite labels. You have just wasted an hour of your time trying to reason with these people! It shakes your faith in human intelligence and reason!

Jesus knew He was being “trolled”! Possessing all power, think of all the things He could he could have done to troll them back! But He refrained!

The vast majority of people today will not give Jesus a real consideration either. Some more than others, of course, but generally people today would rather not deal with the Jesus question. They believe the TV, and the internet, and the movies, and the and their professors, and the “experts”. They even will examine the religious claims of other religions, but they will not seriously consider believing Jesus Himself! He is simply too hard on people, too honest, too politically incorrect, too insightful about humanity and human nature! He also says very unacceptable things for this day and age – like, ***“I am the way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes unto the Father except through me”***. That is considered exclusivistic and offensive! Indeed, it would have been a very outrageous claim to make - that is - if Jesus hadn’t been truly healing people blind from birth, people with spinal injuries who could not walk, people who had never spoken, or who had never been able to hear! People with incurable leprosy or with all manner of common and uncommon disorders, illnesses, and disabilities! ***“I am the Way...”*** would have been the ravings of a lunatic – if He hadn’t multiplied bread and fish for the multitudes, or raised the dead! I mean, someone today can object that the people back then were backwards and gullible. But, Jesus was healing people that were known in the community to have these disabilities or long-term conditions or illnesses! He could not fake a healing on a short term basis. No – these people had their life changed forever!

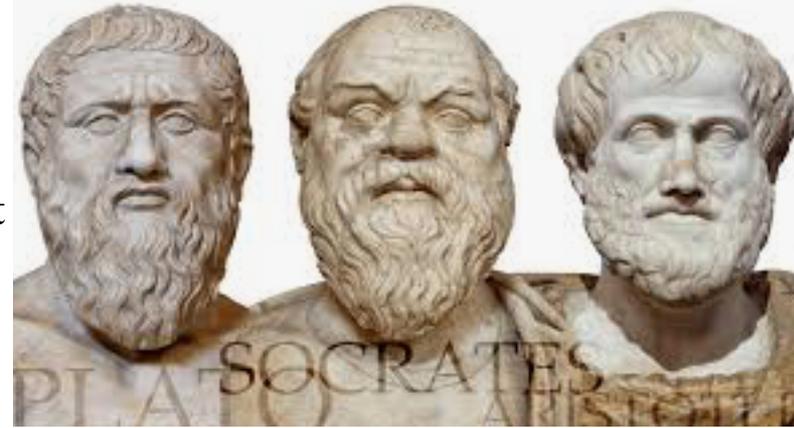


Here was the problem with the Pharisees and Sadducees. They already had a flawed belief system. They were dug in when it came to defending it. They also aggressively promoted their errors to others. It never even dawned on them that they could possibly be wrong. *I've heard evangelical Christians spouting what I consider an erroneous theology, and it sets my teeth on edge – not that they could be in error, but that they don't have a clue that their theology could possibly be a misinterpretation of Scripture. No – they present their view as if it is the only scriptural way, when I know it is not! That is what fries me! It's the attitude, the pride and arrogance, the lack of any introspection!



Jesus saw this same thing in the Pharisees and Sadducees and it drove Him up the wall! They thought they knew it all when they only knew enough to be dangerous to themselves and to others! So he warned His disciples about these errors. It is a dire warning that reverberates to His disciples all the way to today! He compared it to yeast working its way through a batch of bread dough. If any of it was accepted by these disciples, it was going to show up in the early church and skew the course of Christian history. It almost did! In fact, the risen Jesus had to appear to a man named Saul and call him to Himself. Saul, a bitter enemy of Christ-followers everywhere, became, became Paul - Christianity's most aggressive proponent. It took the strength of the personality of Paul to help the original 12 apostles finally reject the leaven of the legalism of Judaism. Judaism focused on the Law of Moses, but Christianity's focus was Jesus!⁶

But the disciples were so slow-witted about what Jesus was saying. I mean they were so far off about this that it is comical. Now, remember that the gospel accounts were written by people who were close to the 12 disciples – who were friends and colleagues with them in Christ’s Kingdom. Yet they do not try to whitewash anything in their accounts. They leave it just as it was. This particular story is a case in point! The disciples were dumbfounded about this statement of Jesus. One of them speculated that He may have been talking about them not having brought any bread along.



So Jesus reminds them that they had just recently seen Him feed two huge crowds until they were stuffed, and He had done it with the tiniest amounts of food to begin with! Of course He was not talking about food. He was not concerned with food. Food was never an issue for Jesus in the same way that storms were never an issue when they were in the middle of one! He was Lord over all matter and all physical laws. That was the small potatoes! But this “yeast” He spoke of was of real concern for Him! It had the potential to unravel, to set back all that He was trying to do!

Now maybe you disagree with that. That’s okay. But I would say that Christian history comes down on my side! We have had many dark periods where the yeast of false teachers has worked its way all through the theological dough and ended up throwing the journey of the church way off course. In fact the very next generation of teachers, right after the apostles (we call them the early church fathers) began trying to meld Greek philosophy with Christian theology! They thought it made Christianity sound more intelligent, more sophisticated, more acceptable. Many of them thought that the Greek philosophers were inspired by God! But it only served to drive the church off course - almost from the beginning!

In fact, after the devastating fourth century influence of Augustine's many, and amazingly varied errors upon the church, the church was launched into a thousand year wilderness of misinformation and malpractice! It is known in western history as “the dark ages”, when knowledge and science was suppressed by the church, a church that had come to control EVERYTHING - even Kings and princes, a church that gave salvation or took it away, a church that it was okay to torture or kill anyone who opposed it's total control, a church that became a mixture of paganism and Christianity – prayer to the saints and to Mary, the eternal virginity of Mary. that became territorial more than individual, and on an on it goes,.. And I really mean that! I could stand here for a week and give you a jaw-dropping history lesson on the excesses and abscesses of that church, and after a week, I'd just be scratching the surface!

How did it happen?! It happened through the yeast of bad beliefs from people who did not care what the Bible said but only about their own power and status! And it happened through bad leaders who did not know God (but who everyone thought did)! And Jesus, our perfect leader, warned us about bad leaders and bad beliefs. But, like the disciples, later disciples didn't get the message. Unlike the original disciples, we swallowed bad beliefs and followed bad leaders throughout church history)! And His *apostles* warned us about it! And the Spirit of God, through the scriptures, repeatedly warn us about it, and a great many people are still not getting it!

Be careful out there! It is a hostile environment for biblical Christianity! Be careful out there! Step carefully because even Christian radio can be a minefield. There is no one but the editor/manager of the station to temper, to choose or reject programming. So you have to be your own editor!

