

Beware of Unbelief

Mark 8:11-21

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Do you pay attention to signs when you see them? It depends, right? I like seeing signs that make me laugh [show funny signs].

It's easy to ignore signs, especially when they've been there for a while. This has happened repeatedly when trucks have traveled down Harrison Street or up Brady Street in Davenport and hit immovable bridges. So far the bridges have won every one of these encounters [check out some pictures of these stuck trucks].

These truck-eating bridges even have their own Facebook page.

One article I found online begins like this: "*Scenes of stunned drivers staring at the crushed hulks of their trailers, their cargo littering the roadway, were common over the years until the Iowa Department of Transportation installed a height detection system with electric warning signs on Harrison Street in 2001.*"

Even with all the new signs and warning systems, crashes continue to happen. I counted three sets of flashing yellow lights and lots of signs on Harrison Street.

But the bridge still gets hit. Why is that? Because signs are often disregarded. Signs alone don't help if you don't pay attention to them.

There was another crash into the bridge on Brady Street on Wednesday.

We're going to see that the enemies of Jesus wanted some additional signs but they end up slamming into the Savior anyway. The disciples of Jesus want to believe but often ignore the signs as well. In our passage for this weekend we see two groups of people.

The phony Pharisees are *settled in their unbelief* and the forgetful followers are *unsettled in their belief*. Let's look first at those who are settled in their unbelief.

Settled Unbelief

Let's set the context by going back to Mark 8:10. Jesus has just fed the 4,000 and is ending his 6-8 month journey in which he took the good news to the unreached Gentiles: ***“And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.”***

As He arrives back on the west side of the Sea of Galilee, we read in verse 11 that the religious Gestapo come out of hiding and slam into Him: ***“The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him.”*** The word ***“came”*** indicates that they ***“came out”*** as if in hiding, marching toward Him with purpose and determination. The word ***“began”*** is in the present infinitive, meaning ***“they began at once and kept it up.”*** Jesus has already given these religious leaders many signs but they don't pay attention to them. All they wanted to do was argue with Him as they sought a way to trap Him.

There were plenty of signs for the Pharisees to see but they had ignored all of them. One of the biggest ones is found in Mark 1:11: ***“And a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.’”*** Jesus had healed diseases, cast out demons, controlled the deep, made a miraculous dinner twice, healed the deaf, and raised the dead. What other signs did they need?

In response to the demands of the phony Pharisees who are settled in their unbelief, Jesus does two things.

1. He denounces them. Their attitude affects Jesus emotionally in verse 12: ***“And He sighed deeply in His spirit...”*** We saw in 7:34 that Jesus sighed when seeing and sensing the situation the deaf man was in. When face-to-face with the Pharisees He sighed because of the hardness of their hearts. The idea is that He ***“snorted with anger.”*** This sighing was done ***“deeply”*** in His soul, which means that it was emphatic and very strong. This is similar to His reaction in Mark 3:5 where ***“He looked around at them in anger, grieved at their hardness of heart.”***

With a hint of exasperation, Jesus then asks them a probing question, ***“Why does this generation seek a sign?”*** In Matthew 16:4, Jesus describes this generation as ***“evil and adulterous.”*** In Mark 9:19, Jesus cries out, ***“O faithless generation...”*** As we come back to our passage, Jesus definitively states with an oath, ***“Truly, I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation.”***

2. He departs from them. Verse 13 is one of the saddest verses in the Bible: ***“And He left them, got into the boat again, and went to the other side.”*** This is an abrupt departure because Jesus knows these men have become settled in their unbelief. They want to fight, not grow in faith. They want to argue, not accept what is true. Jesus no doubt knew Proverbs 23:9: ***“Do not speak in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the good sense of your words.”*** Proverbs 18:2 says: ***“A fool takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in expressing his opinion.”*** Do you know people like that? Jesus is practicing what He taught in Matthew 7:6: ***“Do not give dogs what is holy, and do not throw your pearls before pigs, lest they trample them underfoot and turn to attack you.”***

This is similar to what we read in Psalms 81:12: ***“So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts, to follow their own counsels”*** and Romans 1:24: ***“Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves.”*** In Hosea 4:17, God knows that one of the tribes is so hardened towards Him that He declares: ***“Ephraim is joined to idols; leave him alone.”***

Because these men are so hardened against the Lord, Jesus denounces them and then departs from them. They experience the wrath of God’s abandonment as they are turned over to their own deeds of darkness. That sure explains much of what we see in our culture today, doesn’t it? I like how one pastor puts it: ***“No one goes to Hell because God sends them there. People go to Hell because they refuse to turn from their sins and believe on Jesus.”***

Phony Pharisees can become hardened but so can forgetful followers.

I heard recently about a man who wanted to build a bar next to a church. The congregation strongly opposed it and started praying that it would never open. Just before it was finished, lightning struck the bar and it burned to the ground. The church members rejoiced and gave all the credit to the Lord.

The bar owner then sued the church, claiming that the congregation’s prayers had cost him his building, but the church leaders denied having anything to do with it. The case went to court and the judge wasn’t sure how to rule because he had a bar owner who believed in the power of prayer and a church congregation that didn’t!

The disciples, who were close to Christ, had a hard time believing in Him, even when the signs were very clear.

Unsettled Belief

*While the Pharisees were phony and settled in their unbelief, the closest followers of Jesus were forgetful and unsettled in their belief. Look at verse 14: “**Now they had forgotten to bring bread, and they had only one loaf with them in the boat.**” It’s easy to forget things, isn’t it? Having said that, I wonder how they could have forgotten bread when there were seven large baskets of leftovers available from the feeding of the 4,000. They look around the boat and see just one round loaf of bread.*

They’re not only forgetful, they also get flustered when they hear what Jesus says in verse 15: “**And He cautioned** [kept giving orders] **them, saying, ‘Watch out; beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.’**” Check out the strong words: “**Cautioned...watch out...beware of.**” These are present imperatives or commands that can be translated like this: “*Keep watching out and continue taking heed...always be on your guard against.*”

I’ve often wondered how yeast works in dough. Here’s what I learned online: “*As soon as flour, water and yeast are stirred together, enzymes in the yeast and the flour cause large starch molecules to break down into simple sugars. The yeast metabolizes these simple sugars and exudes a liquid that releases carbon dioxide and ethyl alcohol into existing air bubbles in the dough, causing it to rise.*”

I also stopped by two bakeries on Friday so I could find out more about how yeast works. The first baker said he was too busy when he found out I was a pastor. The second one didn’t know I was a pastor until after he came out to talk to me and then got kind of nervous (I have that affect on people). He told me he didn’t have much time so I explained the passage we’re studying and asked him what would happen if he didn’t use any yeast. He just laughed and said the dough would come out like a rock. I then asked him how much he uses and he told me it just takes a few ounces to work its way through an entire 50-pound chunk of dough.

Yeast is a live, single-celled fungus (you’re probably not going to eat bread again). Leaven is alive and under the right conditions will spread rapidly through the dough. In the Bible leaven is often used as a metaphor for the invisible, pervasive spread of sin. Each Passover season, Jewish people would remove all leaven from their house as a way to remind them of the time when God’s people didn’t have

time to let their bread rise during the Exodus. Getting rid of leaven also represented their desire to live pure lives.

The idea is that it only takes a small amount of leaven working invisibly as it penetrates through the whole loaf. In Galatians 5:9 we read how false teaching can infiltrate a body of believers: ***“A little leaven leavens the whole lump.”*** In 1 Corinthians 5:6, the Apostle Paul explains how sin can spread through an entire church: ***“Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump?”***

In short, the leaven of the Pharisees was bad theology, legalism, and unholy hypocrisy. The leaven of Herod could be stated as an overemphasis on political power, materialism, sexual license, immorality, and worldly focus. This is a good word for us, isn't it? We're surrounded by syrupy and sentimental spirituality that spews from broadcasts and books and we're inundated with the pervasive nature of politics as the ultimate source of satisfaction. Listen. Beware of the leavening nature of both religion and politics.

The disciples are as dense as I am most of the time. Jesus is trying to take them deep and they're all wrapped up in not having lunch in verse 16: ***“And they began discussing with one another the fact that they had no bread.”*** The tense of the word ***“began”*** indicates that they *“kept on talking about it.”* I wonder if they were pointing fingers – *“Peter, you can walk on water, why couldn't you bring the leftovers?”* *“Thomas, you were supposed to bring the bread!”* To which he responded, *“I doubt it.”* (See what I did there?). *“Judas, you're in charge of the shekels. Where's all the bread? You betrayed us!”* (I slipped that one in there, too).

In verse 17, Jesus sets them up for 8 rapid-fire questions as a way to help them, and us, become more settled in our belief in Him as the true Bread of Life: ***“And Jesus, aware of this, said to them...”*** This is a teachable moment as He uses the loaf as a visual aid.

As we look at these questions, we see that Jesus is appealing to their heads, their hearts and their hands. This is a good process for us to go through as well when we find our own faith faltering.

1. Remember God's power in your head. The first two questions found in verse 17 are designed to stir up their memories: ***“Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive or understand?”*** He wants them to

think more deeply about the bread than they have been because they totally misunderstood the message. The word, **“understand”** means, **“to put together.”** Two more questions directed to their minds are found in verse 18: **“Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember?”** To remember means, **“to call to mind.”**

The first place to start when you’re slipping spiritually is to focus on the facts. Bring to mind those things that you know to be true about God. That’s why it’s imperative to read the Bible every day – it helps you remember His words and reflect on His works.

Let me give you an example from Lamentations 3:19-24. Jeremiah is lamenting how difficult things have been as he reflects on the destruction of Jerusalem: **“Remember my affliction and my wanderings, the wormwood and the gall! My soul continually remembers it and is bowed down within me.”** When his mind is set on suffering and pain, he ends up in a really bad place.

I love what he does in verse 20 as he forces the facts about God to the front of his mind: **“But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope...”** His hope is coming back, but not until he disciplines Himself to remember what is true. When He does that, He explodes in exaltation in verses 21-24: **“The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. ‘The LORD is my portion,’ says my soul, ‘therefore I will hope in him.’”**

When your faith is faltering do you force your mind to focus on what’s true?

2. Reflect on God’s purposes in your heart. One of these eight questions is directed to our hearts. It’s found in the last part of verse 17: **“Are your hearts hardened?”** While those who are settled in their unbelief have hardened hearts, it’s possible for followers of Jesus to have hearts that have become hardened as well. I’m sure they didn’t like hearing this question.

Because our default setting is to disengage and not to engage fully in what Christ calls us to do, our sermon series this Fall will be called, *Engage*. To engage means, **“to occupy, attract or become involved in.”** And since our habits flow out of our hearts, we’re going to reflect on some key biblical and cultural issues in this series. Pastor Mel Brown will kick it all off on September 10-11 with a Prophecy Update. We’ll be videoing the Saturday night sermon and showing it on Sunday if

his health won't allow so you may want to come that Saturday night to hear him live.

BTW, during our team retreat this past Tuesday we discussed our attendance patterns in our three services. Our 10:45 service is by far the largest and is getting quite full. If you're able to switch your preferred time and come on Saturday night at 5:00 or at 8:00 on Sunday morning we can make sure we have enough room for our guests. Related to this, if you're able to move toward the center of the pews that would help as well. The front rows are always available but I know that will be a hard sell because we're known as "Back Row Baptists."

Here are the other topics we will tackle in our series: Engaging in Prayer, Engaging in Groups, Engaging with the Ordinances, Engaging Glocally (Missions Festival), Engaging with Your Family, Engaging with the Holy Spirit, Engaging with the Reformation, Engaging as Citizens (this is the weekend before the presidential election), Engaging with the Persecuted and Engaging with Thankfulness (to prepare us for Thanksgiving).

Do you ever hear yourself saying something like this: *"I used to feel like Jesus was near but I don't feel that way anymore."* When we use words like this we know we're living by feelings, not by faith. Friends, our faith is built on fact, not on feelings. Feelings by their very nature will fluctuate.

I still remember a very simple illustration that I came across when I was nineteen years old and brand new in my faith. It's from Campus Crusade for Christ (now Cru). They use a train to demonstrate that facts are the engine, faith is connected to facts and the caboose represents our feelings. Fact → Faith → Feelings. Feelings are important but they should never drive your train.

In order to grow in your faith, start by remembering God's power in your head and then reflect on His purposes in your heart so you don't become hardened. Finally, replay the provision God has put in your hands.

3. Replay the provision God put in your hands. Knowing that our thoughts and feelings can be scattered and untrustworthy, Jesus draws His disciples to replay how He has provided for them in the past. He asks two more questions in verses 19-20 and gets them to actually answer the questions, which is an outstanding teaching method: *"When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?" They said to him, 'Twelve.' 'And*

the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up?’ And they said to him, ‘Seven.’”

They passed their math test and this exercise helped them replay how God had provided in the past. We must do the same. When we remember His faithfulness in the past, we’ll realize He can do the same in the present. That’s why Psalm 103:2 says, **“Forget not all His benefits.”**

The final question brings it all together as He makes an appeal to them in verse 21: **“And He said to them, ‘Do you not yet understand?’”** These questions are not designed to shame or blame but rather to teach and train. According to the parallel passage of this same event, we learn that they finally do understand according to Matthew 16:12: **“Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”**

So, let’s remember God’s *power in our heads*, reflect on His *purposes in our hearts*, and replay the *provision God placed in our hands* in the past. When we do, we’ll grow in our faith as well.

Seeing the Signs

Jesus has given us plenty of signs. We just need to follow them.

I had a very interesting encounter on Friday morning when I was sitting in a MacDonald’s in Moline finishing this sermon. An older man sat in the booth across from me. We both smiled at each other when he sat down. After a few minutes he said, *“Mister, I have a big problem. Do you know where a Catholic church is in this town?”* I told him I wasn’t sure but that I was a pastor. I moved in across from him and listened to his story.

He asked what he should do about some personal problems, so I told him that he first needed to be born again. I explained that Jesus is the bridge between sinners and a holy God and that the only way to be saved is to turn from his sins and ask Jesus into his life. I had just read John 3 that morning so I quoted verse 3 to him: **“Unless you are born again you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.”** I gave him a gospel booklet and urged him to receive Christ and be saved.

I pointed out the signs that God has been giving to him and now I’m praying that my new friend Bob doesn’t crash into the bridge but instead crosses over the

bridge that Jesus made. I love John 5:24: ***“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”***

What about you? Don't ignore the signs any longer. If you do, you're headed for a crash! Submit and surrender to Jesus Christ today and cross over from death to life.

I was struck as I studied this passage that the word ***“generation”*** appears twice. I'm so thankful that Edgewood is a multi-generational church, aren't you? We will continue to be faithful to preach the gospel to *every* generation.

I'm thrilled that God has been bringing members of the millennial generation but we still have a lot of work to do. Millennials include those born between 1980 and 2000. Can you raise your hand if you're part of this generation? How many of you have children born during this 20-year span? All four of our daughters are millennials. How many of you have grandchildren in this generation?

I love millennials for many reasons. Let me list just six:

1. You are looking for a cause and really want to change the world.
2. You want to be mentored by the older generations and value wisdom and insight.
3. You love relationships and teamwork.
4. You know how to seamlessly integrate technology into your lives.
5. You are very pro-life and stand up for the preborn.
6. You are compassionate and caring for people of all races and backgrounds.

But, millennials are the least reached demographic group in history. Almost 2/3 rarely or never attend religious services.

We are not good with this and want to see this change. We long to see a ministry movement among millennials in the QCA, where students and singles live on mission on their campuses, workplaces and neighborhoods for the glory of God and the growth of this church!

That's why we did an extensive nationwide search and ended up calling Pastor Kyle Parks as our new Pastor of Youth and Young Adults! Kyle is joined by his wife and ministry partner, Liesl, along with their two boys – Emory and Sullivan.

→ **Have them come up front.**

Pastor Kyle and Liesl, leaven is normally used to describe the influence of evil, but Jesus also told a parable about the pervasive influence of the gospel in Matthew 13:33: *“The kingdom of heaven is like leaven that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened.”*

Pastor Kyle you are shepherding three measures of flour, if you will.

- 1. Junior High**
- 2. High School**
- 3. Singles**

We’re praying that God will use your influence to influence other influencers so that the gospel message saturates students and singles in the QCA.

If you’re looking for a way to make a kingdom impact among this generation, talk to Pastor Kyle about serving as a sponsor. If you’re serving students or singles right now, can you please stand so we can celebrate your service?

5:00 pm – Membership for Kyle and Liesl

8:00 am – Sullivan Dedication

All services – Commissioning Prayer

Closing Video - Colorado

New Members 10:45 service (Ed) – Ron and Tiffany Handley