

Jesus told them to beware of the leaven

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By Dave Havir

BIG SANDY, Texas—During the physical life of Jesus Christ, He had to deal with various members of the Pharisees and Sadducees. One such example occurred in Matthew 16:1-12.

As was their custom, some Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and sought to tempt Him. This time their temptation was about signs (verses 1-4).

After the encounter had ended, the disciples went to the other side of the coast (verse 5). That same verse mentioned that the disciples forgot to bring bread.

A warning

It was at that time that Jesus gave His disciples a warning. He said: "Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (verse 6).

As it turned out, the disciples did not initially understand His warning. They thought He made those comments because they had forgotten to bring bread (verse 7).

Jesus sought to help them see how short-sighted they were. He reminded them about a few times that He had stretched a small amount of food into enough to feed thousands.

He reminded them about the time that five loaves fed 5,000 people (verse 9) and about the time that seven loaves fed 4,000 people (verse 10).

He asked them how they thought that His original warning could have anything to do with a lack of bread (verse 11).

Finally they understood that He was talking about the doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees (verse 12).

Many of us in the Church of God adjust our bread habits during the Days of Unleavened Bread. We are happy to do so.

However, it would be wise for us to place a far greater emphasis upon the leaven of which Jesus spoke.

Toward the end of Christ's physical life, religious people from various sects sought to entrap Him.

Luke's account (Luke 20:20) describes their approach this way:

"And they watched Him and sent forth spies, which should feign themselves just men, that they might take hold of His words, that so they might deliver Him unto the power and authority of the governor."

Let's notice how representatives from three sects sought to hurt Him.

Leaven of Herodians

In Matthew 22:15-17 some Herodians buttered Him up and then asked Him their question: "Is it lawful to give tribute unto Caesar?"

They were hoping to catch Him saying something bad about the civil government.

While having them look at a coin of the civil government, Christ responded that they should render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's and render unto God the things that are God's (verse 21).

Although Christ was well aware of the corruption in the civil government, He gave instruction for believers to fulfill their responsibilities to the civil government and to God.

(As a brother and a friend, I want to encourage readers to avoid a preoccupation with conspiracy theories. I realize that some branches of the Church of God spend much time discussing conspiracy theories.

(In my opinion believers would be better served spending time studying God's promises and His expectations of us instead of spending too much time studying possible conspiracy scenarios.)

Leaven of Sadducees

Before we read the question that the Sadducees presented to Christ, let's look at a few scriptures about them.

While the sect of the Pharisees had many people who were scribes and lawyers, the sect of the Sadducees had many people who were associated with the priests, the temple and the council.

The Sadducees did not believe in a resurrection.

In Acts 4:1-2 we see both of those factors come into play with the apostles. The Sadducees were upset because the apostles preached Jesus rising from the dead.

In Acts 5:17 we see that the people who were with the high priest were predominantly Sadducees. And these Sadducees were angry. Why?

These members of the council did not like the apostles preaching about the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acts 4:15-18).

The members of the council threw the apostles into prison (Acts 5:18).

After an angel released the apostles (verse 19-21), the council again commanded the apostles to quit speaking about the Christ (verses 22-28). The apostles preferred to obey God rather than men (verse 29).

With these verses in mind, does it surprise you that years earlier the Sadducees approached Jesus with a question about the resurrection? (Matthew 22:23-28).

Christ answered them (in verses 29-32). The last phrase He said was that God is not the God of the dead but of the living.

Leaven of Pharisees

Before we read the question the Pharisees presented to Christ, let's look at a few scriptures about them.

While the sect of the Sadducees had many people who were associated with the priests, the temple and the council, the sect of the Pharisees had many people who were scribes and lawyers.

In Luke 5:17 we see that Pharisees and doctors of the law came to where Christ was teaching. In Luke 7:30 we see that Pharisees and lawyers rejected the counsel of God.

In Acts 5:34 we see that one member of the predominantly Sadducean council was a Pharisee named Gamaliel.

Many things are written in the New Testament about the Pharisees. Obviously they sought to use the law against the Christ.

(Not only did they have an interest in the written law, but many historians show that they also viewed themselves as champions of the oral law.)

In Acts 15:1-5 we see that believers who were a part of the sect of the Pharisees had an interpretation that was viewed as a yoke upon believers (verse 10).

In Philippians 3:1-11 we see that, while Paul appreciated his Pharisaical background, he certainly did not want to place his confidence in the flesh.

With these scriptures in mind, does it surprise you that years earlier the Pharisees sent a lawyer to Christ with a question about the law? (Matthew 22:34-35).

And you know how Christ responded (verses 36-40).

More than bread

When Jesus warned His disciples about leaven, He was not talking about bread.

Jesus was concerned that the doctrines and approaches of the religious sects of His day were a danger to His disciples.

So He warned them to beware of their leaven.