

¹¹ Then the Pharisees came out and began to dispute with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, testing Him. ¹² But He sighed deeply in His spirit, and said, "Why does this generation seek a sign? Assuredly, I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation." ¹³ And He left them, and getting into the boat again, departed to the other side. ¹⁴ Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread, and they did not have more than one loaf with them in the boat. ¹⁵ Then He charged them, saying, "Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod." ¹⁶ And they reasoned among themselves, saying, "*It is* because we have no bread." ¹⁷ But Jesus, being aware of *it*, said to them, "Why do you reason because you have no bread? Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart still hardened? ¹⁸ Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember? ¹⁹ When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments did you take up?" They said to Him, "Twelve." ²⁰ "Also, when I broke the seven for the four thousand, how many large baskets full of fragments did you take up?" And they said, "Seven." ²¹ So He said to them, "How *is it* you do not understand?" ²² Then He came to Bethsaida; and they brought a blind man to Him, and begged Him to touch him. ²³ So He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the town. And when He had spit on his eyes and put His hands on him, He asked him if he saw anything. ²⁴ And he looked up and said, "I see men like trees, walking." ²⁵ Then He put *His* hands on his eyes again and made him look up. And he was restored and saw everyone clearly. ²⁶ Then He sent him away to his house, saying, "Neither go into the town, nor tell anyone in the town." ²⁷ Now Jesus and His disciples went out to the towns of Caesarea Philippi; and on the road He asked His disciples, saying to them, "Who do men say that I am?" ²⁸ So they answered, "John the Baptist; but some *say*, Elijah; and others, one of the prophets." ²⁹ He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered and said to Him, "You are the Christ." ³⁰ Then He strictly warned them that they should tell no one about Him.

Introduction

Last month in Mark's Gospel we covered the story of a Gentile woman who had a daughter who was demon possessed.

At first Jesus seemed to reject her, but afterwards she was rewarded for her faith and the demon was cast out of her daughter.

After this miracle Jesus healed a man who was deaf, and later 4,000 people were fed with 7 loaves of bread and a few small fish.

Following these series of miracles, Jesus got into a boat with His disciples and went to the region of Dalmanutha.

It is in this region that we pick up the story again.

The exact location of where Jesus went is not known but it was somewhere on the western shore of the sea of Galilee.

When Jesus arrived on the other side of the lake, a group of Pharisees were there to meet Him.

As we read the New Testament we discover that whenever Jesus performs a miracle that captures the imagination of the crowds, the Pharisees try to cast a doubt in the minds of the people.

The Pharisees throw out some sort of counterchallenge.

In this case the Pharisees ask for a sign from heaven.

Jesus rejected their request, got back into the boat and returned to the other side of the lake.

We need to ask an important question here.

The question is, why did Jesus refuse to give the Pharisees a sign from Heaven?

Jesus was God in human form and He could have given the Pharisees what they asked for.

1. Seeking a "sign" is not a sign of "faith" – v. 11-12.

The first thing that we need to understand is that behind the question asked by the Pharisees is a challenge to the deity of Jesus.

In Mark's Gospel we have already discovered that the Pharisees accused Jesus of blasphemy because He forgave somebody's sins.

Mark 2: v. 5-7.

⁵ When Jesus saw their faith, He said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven you.” ⁶ And some of the scribes were sitting there and reasoning in their hearts, ⁷ “Why does this *Man* speak blasphemies like this? Who can forgive sins but God alone?”

Also the Pharisees had accused Jesus of working miracles through the power of satan.

Mark 3: v. 22

²² And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, “He has Beelzebub,” and, “By the ruler of the demons He casts out demons.”

Jesus knew exactly what was going on in the heart of the Pharisees.

The next thing that we need to do is to go to Matthew’s Gospel and get a little more information about this encounter with the Pharisees.

Matthew Chapter 16: v. 1-4.

Then the Pharisees and Sadducees came, and testing Him asked that He would show them a sign from heaven. ² He answered and said to them, “When it is evening you say, ‘*It will be fair weather, for the sky is red*’; ³ and in the morning, ‘*It will be foul weather today, for the sky is red and threatening.*’ Hypocrites! You know how to discern the face of the sky, but you cannot *discern* the signs of the times. ⁴ A wicked and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign shall be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.” And He left them and departed.

Matthew enlarges our understanding by telling us that the Pharisees are “spiritually blind”

They can understand the signs in the sky concerning the weather, but they can’t understand the spiritual signs through the miracles of Jesus.

We need to understand that the miracles Jesus performed on this earth were not miracles for the sake of miracles.

They were signs from Heaven which pointed to the deity of Jesus.

Therefore, if Jesus decided to follow the request of the Pharisees, He would be taking away the fulfilment of prophecy concerning Himself.

The Old Testament Prophets pointed to a forthcoming Messiah who would perform various miracles.

Isaiah tells us that the future Messiah would open the eyes of the blind, and heal deaf and dumb people. (Isaiah 35: v.5-6)

Jesus had just performed a miracle which involved the healing of a deaf person.

He wanted the Pharisees to have faith in God’s word concerning himself.

If Jesus had performed some sort of miracle to please the Pharisees, then he would have taken away the need to have **“faith” in God’s word concerning Himself.**

The other reason why Jesus refused to co-operate with the Pharisees request was that at this time in history there were a number of “false prophets” going around who performed miracles which were generated by satan’s power.

Jesus didn’t want to connect Himself with these people.

Deuteronomy Chapter 13: v.1-5.

“If there arises among you a prophet or a dreamer of dreams, and he gives you a sign or a wonder, ² and the sign or the wonder comes to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, ‘Let us go after other gods’—which you have not known—‘and let us serve them,’ ³ you shall not listen to the words of that prophet or that dreamer of dreams, for the LORD your God is testing you to know whether you love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. ⁴ You shall walk after the LORD your God and fear Him, and keep His commandments and obey His voice; you shall serve Him and hold fast to Him. ⁵ But that prophet or that dreamer of dreams shall be put to death, because he has spoken in order to turn *you* away from the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt and redeemed you from the house of bondage, to entice you from the way in which the LORD your God commanded you to walk. So you shall put away the evil from your midst.

If Jesus had done what the Pharisees had asked of Him, then He may well have come into judgement from the **“Scribes”** who knew the Jewish Law very well and might have used these verses against Jesus.

What appeared as an innocent request from the Pharisees **was actually a temptation from satan.**
Satan wanted Jesus to fall into a trap that would undermine His ministry on this earth.

It is interesting that in Matthew’s gospel we are told that the only sign that would be given to that generation was the sign of the prophet Jonah.

To understand this sign we need to understand the story of Jonah from the Old Testament.

Jonah was called by God to go to a wicked city called Nineveh.

Jonah disobeyed God’s instructions and ran away.

He went to the port of Joppa and went on a boat going to Tarshish.

A great storm arose on the boat and there was a danger that the boat would sink and everybody would drown.

The crew discovered that Jonah was running away from God.

Jonah told the crew that if they threw him into the sea, then the sea would become calm and they would be saved.

Eventually and rather reluctantly the crew threw Jonah into the sea.

Jonah was swallowed up by a big fish and was inside that fish for 3 days and 3 nights.

After this time God caused the fish to vomit Jonah onto dry land.

Jonah then obeyed God’s call to preach to the city of Nineveh.

The people of Nineveh repented of their sin and God relented from the disaster that He had planned to bring to them.

It is clear that the only sign that the Pharisees would get would be about the death and resurrection of Jesus.

This would be a last opportunity for the Pharisees to believe in Jesus.

So what personal application can we make for us from these two verses?

Nearly 30 years ago a man by the name of Herman Kahn published a book called “The Future of World Economic Development.” The sub-title was “Projections to the year 2000 and beyond.”

In this book he predicted that the future of religion would be filled with ecstatic experiences and spiritual sensationalism.

One of the reasons that he gave for this statement is that the high technology of our post-industrial civilization tends to dehumanize people.

Therefore, his idea concluded that we can expect religion to super-humanize us with sensational signs.

The conclusion that can be drawn from this is that the more signs that your “religion” requires, the less “faith” you need to have.

The “Gospel” that we preach at O.I.C. requires you to have “faith” in God’s word, the Bible.

Becoming a Christian is not based upon any miracle that you can see.

It is based upon the miracle of Jesus, God’s Son, coming to this earth from Heaven and dying a substitutionary death on a cross for our sins.

This is the sign of Jonah that Jesus talked about.

So to believe in Jesus and become a Christian, you need “faith” in Jesus, without miracles.

The greatest miracle will happen when you believe in Jesus by **“faith”**, without any miracle that you can see.

We saw last month how Jesus rewarded the Gentile woman for her **“faith”**

Jesus will reward you too for your **“faith” in Him as the Son of God, who loves you, and gave Himself for you.”**

2. Jesus warns the disciples about the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod. (v. 13-21)

Jesus was now at the other side of the lake and the disciples had forgotten to take any bread with them to eat.

The situation was used by Jesus as an opportunity to teach his disciples some spiritual truth.

So what was this spiritual truth that Jesus tried to teach the disciples?

The key verse is verse 15.

¹⁵ Then He charged them, saying, "Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod."

First of all, we need to understand what "**Yeast**" is and then understand the connection between the Pharisees and Herod.

Yeast is the driving force behind fermentation.

It is the process that allows a mass of dough to become a well-risen loaf of bread.

However, Yeast is no more than a single-celled fungus.

How does it work?

Yeast works by consuming sugar and excreting carbon dioxide and alcohol.

The important thing to note is that "Yeast" is the power and influence that makes a loaf of bread. **Without "Yeast" there is no bread.**

So now we need to ask the question, what was the power and influence that drove the Pharisees to do what they did and also drove Herod to do what he did?

The simple answer is the "sinful human nature".

We all are born with this nature because of the disobedience of our ancestors, Adam and Eve.

The Pharisees were driven by their sinful nature to create a "**Legalistic Religion**"

It was a "**Religion based upon Laws**, and not upon the "**Grace of God, through Jesus Christ.**"

It was a "Religion" created by the sinful human nature, in order to satisfy the sinful human nature.

All over the world there are thousands of cults and religions.

These religions are created by people with a sinful human nature and are designed to satisfy that nature.

However these religions will never satisfy the deep need of the human heart for forgiveness of sin and a relationship with our creator owner.

In the case of Herod, his sinful human nature drove him to desire power and authority. He would destroy anybody who threatened his power base.

It is the same with the leader of North Korea today.

So the connection between the Pharisees and King Herod is the **sinful human nature.**

It is this nature that drives us to do things, in order to satisfy ourselves without God. The sinful nature only concerns itself with what we want to do and think.

Sadly, at this time the disciples couldn't understand what Jesus was trying to teach.

The disciples thought that Jesus was referring to bread, because they had forgotten to buy some.

Jesus being aware of their focus upon the bread, told the disciples that they had eyes and ears but couldn't see or perceive the spiritual significance of His teaching.

Jesus then went back and reminded the disciples about the two miracles involving the abundant supply of bread.

Jesus was concerned that they remembered how many baskets of left- over food were recovered after each miracle.

Why did Jesus do this?

I think that the answer is to go into John's Gospel and read the teaching of Jesus after John records the miracle of the feeding of the 5,000.

John Chapter 6: v. 26-40 in the N.L.T.

²⁶ Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, you want to be with me because I fed you, not because you understood the miraculous signs. ²⁷ But don't be so concerned about perishable things like food. Spend your energy seeking the eternal life that the Son of Man can give you. For God the Father has given me the seal of his approval." ²⁸ They replied, "We want to perform God's works, too. What should we do?" ²⁹ Jesus told them, "This is the only work God wants from you: Believe in the one he has sent." ³⁰ They answered, "Show us a miraculous sign if you want us to believe in you. What can you do?" ³¹ After all, our ancestors ate manna while they journeyed through the wilderness! The Scriptures say, 'Moses gave them bread from heaven to eat.'" ³² Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, Moses didn't give you bread from heaven. My Father did. And now he offers you the true bread from heaven. ³³ The true bread of God is the one who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." ³⁴ "Sir," they said, "give us that bread every day." ³⁵ Jesus replied,

“I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry again. Whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. ³⁶ But you haven’t believed in me even though you have seen me. ³⁷ However, those the Father has given me will come to me, and I will never reject them. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven to do the will of God who sent me, not to do my own will. ³⁹ And this is the will of God, that I should not lose even one of all those he has given me, but that I should raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁰ For it is my Father’s will that all who see his Son and believe in him should have eternal life. I will raise them up at the last day.”

The point Jesus makes is that believing in Him is the most important thing in life, even more important than physical food.

3. A blind man is healed at Bethsaida – v. 22-26.

This is the second of two miracles that are only recorded in Mark’s gospel.

The other miracle is the healing of the deaf man in Mark 7: v. 31-37 which we covered last month.

In both miracles Jesus took the person away from the crowd.

He didn’t want the miracle to be a public spectacle.

The other thing to note about this miracle is that it is the only gradual miracle recorded in any of the four gospels.

All the other miracles performed by Jesus were instant.

It is likely that Mark put these two miracles together in order to connect them to the prophecy made by Isaiah.

Isaiah Chapter 35: v. 5.

⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.

Mark is trying to get his readers to believe that Jesus is the long awaited Messiah that was prophesied by the Old Testament Prophets.

I don’t think that there is a big significance in the two-stage healing of the blind man.

However, what is significant is that Jesus has just told the disciples that they have eyes, but they can’t see.

Just as the blind man was totally dependent upon Jesus for his healing and sight, so we also are totally dependent on Jesus for our spiritual healing and spiritual sight.

When you become a Christian, you can suddenly see things that you couldn’t see before.

There is a dimension to your thinking and understanding that wasn’t there before you trusted in Jesus Christ to save you for your sins.

Just like the blind man in the miracle, you gradually see more and more as God reveals things to you through the Bible.

It is no wonder that Jesus said **“I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.” (John 8: v.12)**

So if we want to continually have light, we need to follow Jesus.

4. Peter confesses Jesus as the Christ – v. 27-30.

As Jesus was walking on the road to Caesarea Philippi He asked his disciples a very important question.

The question was **“Who do men say that I am?”**

The disciples answered by telling Jesus that some people thought that He was

“John the Baptist”, some thought that He was **“Elijah”** and others thought that Jesus was **“one of the prophets”**.

Jesus wasn’t really interested in what other people thought about His identity, but He was very interested in who the disciples thought that He was.

Peter’s answer was the only one recorded here.

He said “You are the Christ.”

After this declaration by Peter, Jesus warned the disciples that His identity should be kept a secret.

So what is significant about this confession of Peter?

First all of us need to go back to **Mark Chapter 1 v. 1 –**

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

In this verse Mark declares his purpose in writing this gospel.

Up to now, the disciples hadn't discovered who Jesus really is.

However, the disciples had experienced miracles of healing.

Peter's Mother-in-Law had been healed, a Leper had been healed, demons had been cast out of people by Jesus, deaf and blind people had been healed.

These miracles fitted in with prophecy about the forthcoming Messiah.

On top of all this the wind and the waves had obeyed the voice of Jesus.

Over the period of time that Jesus had been with the disciples, **the evidence of who He is was made clear to the disciples.**

Suddenly there was a breakthrough in their understanding.

Perhaps Peter saw it first.

Suddenly they discovered that Jesus is God, in human form.

The God of the Bible is a "Trinity". That means, one God, but in three forms.

There is God the Father, who is God. (Rom.1: v. 7)

There is God the Son, who is God, (Hebrews 1: v.8)

and God the Holy Spirit, who is also God. (Acts 5: v. 3-4)

This truth is very clearly seen in the Baptism of Jesus.

Matthew 3: v. 16-17.

¹⁶When He had been baptized, Jesus came up immediately from the water; and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting upon Him. ¹⁷And suddenly a voice *came* from heaven, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

In these verses, the Father speaks from Heaven, the Son is being Baptised, and the Holy Spirit comes down in the form of a dove.

We may not understand the "Trinity" and how it all works, but we need to believe it because it is clearly set forth in the New Testament and alluded to in the Old Testament.

In closing, what we need to be clear about, is our Salvation.

Today we celebrate "Communion".

The service is a "Thanksgiving" service for all that Jesus has achieved for us by dying on a cross to take the punishment of our sin.

Taking part in this service means that you **understand who Jesus is, and what He has done for you personally.**

If you have confessed your sin to Jesus and asked for His forgiveness, then your eyes should be open to the importance of this "**Communion**" celebration.

Let us now begin this celebration with prayer.