**WATCH OUT FOR THE YEAST**

Mark 8:1-21 (Key Verse 15)

*““Be careful, Jesus warned them. “Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod””*

In today’s passage we are going to witness Jesus who gave a stern warning to his disciples to watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod. Yeast as we know it is mainly used in the mixture to bread, causing the bread to rise, and become soft and delicious. So in the same way something very small, but yet with a great influence is referred to as a yeast. And here the yeast of the Pharisees and Herod referred to their bad influence. Their influence was bad such that, if Jesus disciples were to be influenced a little bit by it, the consequence would be utterly serious. And hence Jesus warned the disciples sternly to be careful and watch out. Therefore, through today’s passage we are going to learn what is the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod? And how their consequence can be dire? We are also going to learn what is the yeast we need to watch out for today. May God have mercy on us today to receive one word, be equipped to be careful and watchout for the yeast of today.

The passage today begins with Jesus and his disciple surrounded by a large crowd which followed them from Decapolis, a Gentile region where Jesus preached the gospel, healed the sick and drove out demons from many people. Jesus invested time and effort to take care of the gentile population which was neglected and rejected by the Jewish leaders. When the people saw Jesus’ shepherd heart, they followed him wherever he went, and this time they stayed with him for 3 days. Jesus brought to them what they have been longing for, and they kept following him. After the people had been with Jesus for 3 days, Jesus called his disciples to him said something amazing to them. Let us look at **verse 2-3** to see what Jesus had said to his disciples: *“I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. 3 If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance.”*

Jesus realized that the people had been with him for a long time and that they were hungry, previously when Jesus was surrounded by a large crowd that needed to be fed the disciples suggested that Jesus send them away. But today Jesus noticed that the crowd needed something to eat and did not send them away. Rather he said: “*I have compassion on them*” and did not want to send them away for he was concerned that they will collapse on the way for some have come a long way. Here Jesus revealed that he is not just concerned about our spiritual needs, but also our physical need. Jesus is concerned about our food issue, he is concerned about our job issue, our studies and wants to provide for us so that we do not collapse. So, we should not be shy to come to Jesus to help us with our food issue, job issue and academic issue for that too is very important to Jesus.

When Jesus expressed his compassion and desire to resolve the hunger issue of the crowds, the disciples gave him a negative response in **verse 4** saying: *“But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?”*- This is the very same disciple who witnessed Jesus feed the 5000 with 5 loaves and 2 fish in Chapter 6, they did not just hear about it but they participated and witnessed the 5 loaves and 2 fish multiply and feed the 5000. But what was their issue? How come they responded in this way?They should have said, yes Lord, we saw you feed the 5000 before, they should have brought what they had to Jesus to multiply it. But what was their issue? The issue is that they forgot who Jesus is. Their minds were occupied by other things. In a similar way many people today experience the help of God, they witness the power of God but still when they face a challenge in the future, they do not hold on to their faith in Jesus but panic and remain consumed by the limitation of logic saying where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them. In order to experience the power of Jesus and his help in every situation, we need to remember who he is. Jesus is the Son of God, with power and authority over all things. We need to continuously remember what he has done.

Even though the disciples responded negatively to Jesus’ plan to feed the people, Jesus did not leave them there, but rather like a good Shepherd Jesus continued to help the disciples by making them participate in the feeding of the 4000 to remind them that he is Son of God, with authority over all things. Jesus asked them in **verse 5** saying: *“How many loaves do you have?” “Seven,” they replied.”* He had them sit crowd on the ground and fed the crowd with the 7 loaves, they also brought 2 fish and all the people ate and were satisfied. The disciples picked up 7 basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. And thereafter Jesus and the disciples got into a boat and went to the region of Dalmanutha.

While in Dalmanutha, the Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him they asked him for a sign from heaven. The Pharisees witnessed Jesus heal many people, the man with a shriveled hand, the paralytic, they saw Jesus feed the 4000 with 7 loaves and 2 fish. Jesus’ gospel ministry on its own was a sign from heaven for it moved many people, people were changed and transformed. Now how come they asked Jesus for a sign from heaven? They asked Jesus for a sign from heaven for they had their own idea of a sign from heaven, they wanted their own kind of miracle, such as Israel’s rule over the world and overthrow of the Roman empire. They thought what Jesus was doing was not good enough. They were like this because of their materialistic and worldly mindset. They did not have the things of God in mind. Because of this mindset they could not see the miracle of God that took place before their eyes. When Jesus saw this, it says in **verse 12**: “*He sighed deeply and said, “Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to it.””* When we are filled with a worldly mindset like the Pharisees, we cannot see the miracle of God happening in our lives. Jesus sighed deeply, for the Pharisees were the chosen spiritual leaders for the people, but they were spiritually blind. Because of this they could not lead the people to God, but rather became hindrance because of their worldly mindset. Jesus sighed deeply for he was deeply concerned for the people of God who needed genuine spiritual leaders who can lead them to God with a sense of the work of God in the people’s lives.

After Jesus’ encounter with the Pharisees, he left them and got back into the boat and went to the other side with the disciples, who while on the journey realized that they had forgotten to bring the left-over bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat. While the disciples were on about the bread, Jesus gave them a stern warning. Let us look at the key **verse 15**: *“Be careful,” Jesus warned them. “Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod.”* Jesus warned the disciples to watchout for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod. Yeast is a very small ingredient in baking of bread. But it spreads to the whole loaf, causing it all to rise. In the same way Jesus warned the disciples to watch for the yeast of the Pharisees and Herod. Here the yeast that Jesus was referring to is the bad influence of the Pharisees. For a small amount of bad influence can corrupt an entire church body, just like the small amount of yeast can influence the hole loaf of bread.

But what bad influence was Jesus referring to? Firstly, the Pharisees are very well known for their legalism, self-righteousness, spiritual pride, love for money and hypocrisy. We learnt in the past how they religiously washed their hands according to their traditions but yet they did not wash their hearts, we learnt how they prayed in the public places and yet when they came to their homes, they were completely changed people who did not pray at home or do the things of God. Their life of faith was like a show to be seen by people; they were actors. They looked down on the gentiles and the people they were supposed to serve and lead. Today they asked Jesus for a sign, when many signs were before them, they were spiritually blind. On the other though the Pharisees’ lives of faith had no truthfulness, they were ruling the people and had all kinds of benefits, wealth and glory. And so when the disciples saw their power, rule and benefits they could be influenced to desire to live like them. They could question why they have to suffer as Jesus’s disciples when they can also enjoy benefits like the Pharisees. And Jesus warned them to watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees, for that little influence can lead them astray, to live fruitless life like the Pharisees. If they are not careful, the little influence of the Pharisees could leave them spiritually blind with no insight and wisdom to lead God’s people like the Pharisees.

Furthermore, Jesus warned the disciples against the yeast of Herod as well. Herod took his brother’s wife, and he also beheaded John the Baptist, a righteous man. He was an immoral political leader and did unrighteous thing recklessly. But he was not punished, but rather he enjoyed life with the woman he wanted, he enjoyed a banquet with high officials and military commanders, boasting about himself. In the midst of all this, John the who was innocent and dedicated his life to the Gospel ministry was beheaded. Thinking about all this the disciples could be discouraged, and question why God is letting man like Herod enjoy life while servants of God are suffering. In my early days at UBF I had a friend who stayed at my place, and one time I invited him to come to church with me and he told me that he does not do church because many people he knows who do church seem to be suffering. When he said this, it hit me, and somehow, I felt he had a point. What he said planted some form of doubt in my heart, a negative influence in my heart. That is why Jesus warned the disciples to be careful, to watchout for the yeast of Herod.

How about today, what yeast should we watch out for? Just like the time of Jesus there many things going on today that may seem small and yet their influence could be dire. For example, today there are many churches that are too focused on prosperity gospel. While we learnt from today’s passage that Jesus values our daily needs such as what we will eat, our job and academic success. What needs to be first and for most in the church is the preaching of repentance and turning away from sin, however today many churches are shying away from preaching and rebuking sin such as sexual immorality, they say they are focused on welcoming everyone, and at the same time neglect the rebuke of sin. Because of this Jesus is warning us today, saying be careful of the yeast. For these things might seem like small, but the consequence are dire both for individuals and the ministry of God. Because of this small influence many great servants of God have fallen, and the people of God led astray. That is why Jesus is so concerned about this. Jesus wants me and you to grow spiritually; to know him and be blessed by him, he wants me and you to be used by him as spiritually leaders for this generation. But to do this, we need to watchout for the yeast, we need to watchout for a double life, we need to watchout for a worldly mindset and come to Jesus in prayer.

When Jesus said to the disciples, be careful, watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and Herod, they were confused and asked each other is it because we have no bread. They responded in this way because their hearts were hardened, like the Pharisees they had in mind the things of the world. When we have a worldly mindset, we will fall victim of the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod. And so, to help them Jesus rebuked them and reminded them how he fed the 5000 with 5 loaves and 2 fish, he reminded them how he fed the 4000 with 7 loaves and 2 fish. Jesus reminded them to help them so that they can remember that he is the creator of the heavens and the earth, with power and authority over all things. In order to overcome the yeast of the Pharisees and Herod we need to remember that Jesus is the Son of God, we need to remember what Jesus has done, his power and authority and not live according to our own thinking and wisdom, not live with a worldly mindset. But to put our full trust in Jesus, to look unto to Jesus for all things.

As I was preparing the message I was very challenged for I realized that I had been influenced by the yeast of the world, instead of focusing on obeying Jesus commands and living for the house of God, I found myself living to be liked by my bosses at work and compromising on the mission that God has given to serve campus ministry as a Shepherd. Recently I was sent to Ghana to do a job that was no longer mine, the last time I did that kind of a job was 5 years ago. I accepted to do it because I thought I will save the day and my management will be happy and like me. The sad thing is that the managers know this about me, this other day I heard that one of the managers said I will never say no. Because if my sin of wanting to please others, I was left far away from my family and sheep and could not serve them. I also experienced a sense of emptiness due to lack of fellowship with other leaders through Bible studies as I could not join them on Tuesday evening. Jesus said be careful, watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and Herod. I therefore pray that God may have mercy on me, to take this warning seriously to be careful, to watchout for the yeast. Repent from the sin of wanting to please people, my managers at work and look upon Jesus for all things. May God be with you as well, to be careful and watch out and not say it is small thing. As we have learnt from the yeast of the Pharisees and Herod, their influence may seem small but the results thereof is quite large, like the huge expansion of bread through a very small portion of yeast.

Amen, Key Verse