

Mark 8:14-21 - Beware the Leaven of the Pharisees

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 31 December 2023

Preacher: Nathan Rambeck

[0 : 00] All right, so if you've got your Bible, open up to the book of Mark. We are in chapter, what is it, 8? We're getting close.

Once we get to chapter 8, we'll be, through chapter 8, we'll be halfway through Mark. Let's see if I can find it.

I should have bookmarked it. We've seen Jesus, last week we talked just briefly about the feeding of the 4,000. Jesus had already fed 5,000 previously, but this was another miracle of food multiplication and feeding hungry people.

And then we saw another interaction with the Pharisees. And what we're going to talk about today is really a continuation of that interaction with the Pharisees.

The Pharisees came out to see Jesus, and unfortunately, not because, not with a humble heart to see, is this man really who he says he is, with a real genuine heart to investigate, but they were asking questions really with a heart of pride and resistance to who he was, asking for a sign.

[1 : 28] And Jesus was not happy with that, and he said, no, I'm not going to give you a sign. You've seen plenty already, and that's good enough. And if you want another sign, if you're not going to believe unless you get another sign, then fine.

I'm not going to show you anything else. You've seen plenty of signs from what the prophets have said to all the things that I've done to the people who have testified about me, and let that be enough.

So, as we continue on today, we're going to be in Mark chapter 8. We're going to look at verse 13 through 21. And Jesus is having an interaction here with his disciples.

And he has a quick lesson to teach them, but there's some confusion. And Jesus actually gets, it sounds like he gets pretty annoyed. And so, he kind of goes off on their, really their, their focus, where their minds are at, and talks about that.

So, he's going to talk about the leaven of the Pharisees. So, we're going to, we're going to look at that this morning. But then also, kind of a lesson about where our minds are at, and what our focus is on.

[2 : 42] Because that's a big thing that comes up in this, in this passage is, where are the minds of these disciples? Is it on spiritual things, or is it on, on physical things?

Yes. Specifically, food, in this case. Because there's some confusion when Jesus talks about the leaven of the Pharisees. Well, what's he talking about? And they think he's talking about food. Let's go ahead and read. Again, Mark 8, chapter 13.

And he left them, and getting into the boat, he left the Pharisees, getting into the boat again, departed to the other side. Now, the disciples had forgotten to take bread, and they did not have more than one loaf with them in the boat.

Then he charged them, saying, Take heed. Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod. And they reasoned among themselves, saying, It's because we have no bread?

It's more of a question. 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?

[3 : 49] Is your heart still hardened? Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of fragments did you take up?

And they said to him, Twelve. 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. So he said to them, How is it you do not understand? So, let's go back and we're going to go through this just verse by verse and then we're going to talk some big picture details about leaven and about this whole situation with him talking about the food, this food focus.

Also, we're going to be looking just at a few verses in Matthew chapter 16 which has a parallel account to this. It's the same account just from somebody else's perspective and there's a little bit of extra detail and so Matthew chapter 16 we'll look at in just a second.

So he says, Now the disciples had forgotten or the scripture here says, Now the disciples had forgotten to take bread and they did not have more than one loaf with them.

[5 : 06] and so they had forgotten to take bread. You know, when you have 12 plus Jesus, 13 people, there may have been others, right, in their entourage, one loaf of bread is not a lot and so that'll go rather quickly.

That'll just be a snack for everybody or maybe a meal for just one person and so there was likely some discussion about that. You can kind of imagine, you know, James says, Hey Tom, I'm hungry.

Where's the bread at? And Tom says, Well, I didn't bring any. And James says, Well, what do you mean you didn't bring any? I told you and Andrew to put the leftovers from the feeding of the 4,000 into the boat.

There were seven baskets left over. What happened? Thomas says, Well, Oh, and so James says, Well, what do you mean you didn't bring any?

I told you and Andrew to put the leftovers in the boat and Thomas says, Well, I thought Andrew got it. Andrew says, Well, I thought Tom got it. And so there's this discussion going on about the food and then I imagine, right, you're traveling, you don't have a lot of food.

[6 : 24] There's some concern here about, Well, where's our next meal going to come from? So, in the midst of all this, and, you know, we just get a little bit about, there's some awareness that they don't have a lot of food, they just have one loaf of bread, and just likely some discussion about that.

But in the midst of all this, in verse 15, Jesus says something. He wants to teach them about something, and maybe it's because there's this focus on bread, and so here's an opportunity to teach a spiritual lesson related to food.

It says, Then he charged them, saying, Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod. This is a warning.

Take heed, beware. This comes right on the heels of Jesus having a confrontation with the Pharisees, in which he was pretty upset at their attitude towards him, and really, their questions that did not come from a humble heart, but were antagonistic toward him.

Take heed, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees. Leaven. Leaven, it's not a word that we use often today, but today we use the word yeast. You use yeast. Most people know what yeast is. If you've ever done any baking, if you want your bread to actually get fluffy, to rise, you have to put yeast in it.

[7 : 53] Otherwise, you just get flat bread, which is fine, but fluffy bread is a little bit more appealing to a lot of us, right? And so there's some kind of symbolism here with leaven and something to do with the Pharisees.

We'll talk about that in a second. He mentions leaven of two groups of people, the Pharisees and then also Herod. And so I don't think he's talking about Herod the individual.

We've talked about before, there was actually many Herods, even at the same time. But over generations, there were many Herods. It was more of a dynasty called the Herodian dynasty.

In Matthew chapter 16, like I mentioned, in verse 6, it says, then Jesus said to them, take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. So there, mentions not just the Pharisees and Herod, but also the Sadducees.

So this morning, we're going to actually look at these three groups. and talk a little bit more about them. But to continue on, and so they reasoned among themselves, saying, it is because we have no bread?

[9 : 06] They're not sure where this statement came from. Like, was he responding to their conversation about food? Was it related to their bread shortage?

Was he telling them, hey, when you buy, the next time you go to buy food, don't buy it from the Pharisees? Was that what he was saying? They were confused.

Verse 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?

So it sounds like they were having kind of a conversation to the side and Jesus became aware of it. Maybe he overheard them talking, trying to understand what it was that he said.

Notice they didn't ask him a question, they were just talking among themselves. They probably should have asked him, right, to expand upon what he was saying, but they didn't. Jesus found it troubling that they didn't understand what he was talking about.

[10 : 12] He was pretty peeved, it sounds like. And to me, it sounds somewhat like an overreaction. Does anybody else kind of feel that way?

Like Jesus is kind of overreacting. I mean, he was being, it seems, he was being somewhat vague. He just says a thing and Jesus does this. Sometimes he uses parables and parables, we've talked about many times, meant to be intentionally vague.

What is Jesus looking for? He's looking for those who want to know the truth. They'll dig and try to draw out more. But for those who aren't really interested, they'll just pass on by and they won't get the lesson.

But for those who are really interested, those who really want to know the truth, they'll say, hey Jesus, what did you mean by that? And a lot of times, Jesus does that intentionally to try to draw out that interest.

So that only those who are really interested, those who really want to know the truth will find it. He mentions, he says, do you not yet perceive nor understand?

[11 : 19] Is your heart still hardened? And usually when you think of a hard heart, you think about a sinful heart, one that's rebellious. But I don't think that's what Jesus was talking about here and he's actually used this hard-hearted phrase before regarding his disciples.

and I think the last time we talked about it, he was kind of saying you're hard-headed. We usually say hard-headed because, you know, you're not thinking correctly.

Sometimes we call somebody a knucklehead, right? And so, their understanding was dull. Not that their hearts were in rebellion against God or him, but their understanding was dull.

They're hard-headed. Verse 18, having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember? And so, he reminds them of these two different events where he fed tens of thousands of people right before their eyes.

And he asks them and gets a response from them, how much was left over? Not only were they fed, but how much was left over? And they respond, 12 baskets left, seven baskets.

[12 : 31] And then he ends it off with, so he said to them, how is it that you do not understand? And then this account ends. We'll look at it in Matthew.

Matthew ends it a little bit differently. But what was it that Jesus was chastising them for? It's not just that they misunderstood what he was talking about, but the reason why they misunderstood.

The reason why they misunderstood. They could have asked him again, well, what exactly is this leaven of the Pharisees that you're talking about, Jesus?

Explain to us more. And if they would have asked him, he probably would have just told them. He wouldn't have gotten, you know, upset like it seems that he has here. It seems his concern with them is that their focus was on food, on provisions.

Are my needs going to get met? Am I going to get my next meal? No. Yet Jesus had taught early on in his ministry with these 12, explicitly don't worry about food.

[13 : 53] Don't give any thought to food. During this time, this three years of ministry that Jesus would have with his disciples, he intended that God would provide for all of their needs.

During this time, it was important for these disciples with Jesus that their attention, the bulk of their attention would be not on caring for their own personal needs, food and clothing and shelter and such, but they would focus on this important ministry of preaching the kingdom of God.

If we go back to the Sermon on the Mount and I'm going to have you turn there, Matthew chapter 6, we can see what Jesus taught them. He taught his disciples at the very beginning of his ministry with them.

Matthew chapter 6, verse 25. Matthew chapter 6, verse 25. Therefore, I say to you, again, who's he talking to?

You've got to go back actually a couple chapters or a chapter or two to see who he's talking to. He's talking to his disciples. He sits them down and teaches them before they venture out on this three-year mission.

[15 : 11] Therefore, I say to you, do not worry about your life. And that term, worry, this is New King James. I think the King James says, give no thought to.

And that's a more literal translation. I don't want you to spend your attention, your thoughts, on food. Don't worry about your life, your physical life.

What you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? Now, food is important, right?

We need to be fed, otherwise we won't live. But is food all there is to life? No. He's saying there's more to life and the more that there is to life is what I want you to focus all your time and attention on.

And then he talks about the birds and how God actually provides for animals like the birds. Look at the birds of the air for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns yet your heavenly Father feeds them.

[16 : 19] Are you not of more value than they? So God is capable, right, of feeding people if he wants to. Which of you by worrying can add one cubit to his stature?

So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow, they neither toil nor spin and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now if God so clothes the grass of the field which is today and tomorrow was thrown into the oven will he not much more clothe you, oh you of little faith?

And so Jesus is teaching early on his disciples we have a mission and during this mission I don't want you to be concerned about these provisions, these normal parts of life.

What am I going to wear? What am I going to eat? Where am I going to live? I want you to be focused on our mission. If we actually look at the account in Matthew chapter 16 Matthew chapter 16 verse 8 Jesus uses this exact same phrase in talking to his disciples.

He says oh you of little faith why do you reason among yourselves because because you have brought no bread? He used the exact same phrase here in Matthew chapter 6 in the sermon on the mount as he did there in that boat when they were talking about bread and Jesus brought up the leaven of the Pharisees.

[17 : 56] Oh you of little faith he wants them to trust him and to trust the father that during these three years of ministries your needs will be provided for.

don't spend important attention and focus on those things I'll take care of it. Don't spend any attention don't spend any time thinking about those things.

During this season of ministry Jesus needed them to be laser focused on the mission. God would provide for all their needs and they just needed him to trust him for that.

So continuing on in Matthew 6 31 therefore do not worry saying what shall we eat or what shall we drink or what shall we wear for after all of these things the Gentiles seek for your heavenly father knows what you need that you need all these things.

God knows when you're hungry he knows that you need food. He doesn't want you to focus on these things right now but he'll make sure that you have them. And he says this in verse 33 but seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added to you.

[19 : 16] If you'll just focus on our mission of the kingdom and calling people to righteousness to enter the kingdom if you'll focus on this mission all your needs will be met.

don't focus any time and attention on provisions. Focus on the kingdom. You know these three years of the ministry of Jesus with his disciples I think we can arguably say is the three most important years in the history of the world.

He's huge. Here is the Messiah come and he's coming with a message to prepare Israel for a kingdom.

And so the message that he had and the message that the disciples had was to Israel repent for the kingdom of God is at hand. That was their mission over these three years to prepare Israel for the coming kingdom.

And so that's what Jesus meant here when he says seek first the kingdom of God. And I think this particular passage on the Sermon on the Mount is misunderstood and we tend to apply it to ourselves today and I don't think it does apply and we'll talk about that more in a second.

[20 : 49] Just to give an example. Anybody like western films? You'll see a western film and a lot of times it will be the big time rancher right?

He's got a big ranch, pretty wealthy and he has a lot of hired hands. And the hired hands they live in the bunkhouse on the ranch. And maybe this rancher has a dozen hired hands and those hired hands do they typically have to worry about where they meet next meal is going to come from?

No, usually right, the rancher, he has a full-time cook that prepares breakfast, lunch and dinner for all the hired hands. And because of that, they can focus all of their attention and energy on doing the ranching work.

Rustling up cattle, installing fences, all those things. And you can imagine if the owner of the ranch goes out and he sees his hired hands squabbling about, well, I'm not sure where our next meal is going to come from.

He would probably be pretty upset about that, right? Do I not have a full-time cook for you guys? Why are you spending so much time and attention and energy thinking about, oh, I'm not sure if we're going to have enough food when day after day after day I provide three full meals for you?

[22 : 22] Don't think about these things. I want you to put your time, attention and energy to ranching. That's what's important. So Jesus reminds his disciples about these two times when food was scarce.

And he said, hey, did anybody go hungry? Did you go hungry? No. Were there leftovers at the end of all of it? Yeah, how many baskets? Tell me the number. There was a lot of food left over.

And so I really think that Jesus' frustration with his disciples was justified. This is something he'd been teaching them. I mean, we're looking.

This is probably about two and a half, somewhere between two and a half and three years into Jesus' ministry. And Jesus had been teaching them these things for a while. And he had just given them a critical warning about the Pharisees.

Something that was very important. And because their minds were on food and where their next meal was going to come from, they missed it. They didn't even ask him, well, what's that all about?

[23 : 43] They just assumed he was talking about food because that's where their mind and attention was on. In Matthew chapter 16, again, the parallel passage, it says in verse 12, then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

You see, they actually didn't really need a lot of explanation. as soon as they realized, he's not talking about how are we going to get our next meal, he's talking about the Pharisees, the Sadducees, Herod, and the leaven that can infect us.

I think that was enough. They didn't need a lot of detail or explanation. They understood, but they just had to get their minds focused in the right direction.

You know, I really sympathize with the disciples. I think a lot of people, you know, it's easy, right, looking back at the disciples and think, oh, well, what a bunch of knuckleheads. Shouldn't they have, you know, figured this stuff out?

But when I look back at the disciples, you know what I see? I see myself. I have a hard time imagining I would have done anything different. I would have been in the same boat.

[25 : 09] I would have been in I also think about these guys are young, these guys are men, one, and they're young men. What is, did you notice that men, and especially young men, are obsessed with food?

Anybody notice that? Especially moms, right? And so it is a particular kind of obsession.

It's easy for men, and especially young men, to focus. especially too much on food, which is basically, which is actually, I think young ladies can take note, you know.

You don't have to be a drop-dead gorgeous woman to get yourself a man. All you have to do is smile a lot and be a great cook, and men will line up. Men like food.

So what's the application for us? One, I want to look at a misapplication. We can look at what Jesus taught here, with Jesus' focus, both in the Sermon on the Mount and this thing about food, and we could try to apply that directly to ourselves and our spiritual life.

[26 : 25] And, you know, I've known people who they don't have a job. Because, well, Jesus seemed to say that we need to focus so heavily on spiritual things and not on physical things.

And their life is kind of a mess. In our context, in the day in which we live, and we call this the age of grace, it is important for us to give thought, to give time, to give attention, to providing for our own needs and the needs of our family.

It's important that we do that. And if we misapply what's going on here in the Gospels, our lives will be a mess. In fact, if we look at what Paul says to us in this age of grace, he says this in 2 Thessalonians 3, verse 10.

You don't have to turn there, but I'll just read this. 2 Thessalonians 3, verse 10. For even when we were with you, he's talking to the Thessalonians, his entourage, we commanded you this, if anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.

And a couple verses later, he says, now those who are such, we command and exhort through the Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread, not somebody else's bread.

[27 : 47] Notice there's a difference here. Did Jesus' disciples eat their own bread? Never. They didn't make their own food. It was provided for them.

Other people made it for them. They were given gifts from other people, provisions from others through the working of God. But here, Paul teaches believers in Thessalonica, work with your own hands to provide your own bread for yourselves and your families.

And if you don't, he says in another place, you are worse than an infidel. Your life, where you don't provide for your family especially, he called them that their life was worse than the life of an infidel.

And really, this is how life has operated and how God intends life to operate throughout the history of most of the world. Old Testament, you work for your food. You don't work, you don't eat.

It was just during this special time, these three years, where kind of the rules changed, the expectations changed for Jesus and his disciples and those who were following after him.

[29 : 06] Yet, I think we can take a lesson that we should be careful where our attention and energies are focused, right? Should all of our attention and time and energy just be focused on our physical needs?

You know, as we kind of plod through life, we need to fix the leaky faucet, right? We need to cook the next meal.

We need to change another diaper. We need to do all these things to take care of ourselves and our family and sometimes our neighbor and our friends. We need to focus on those things, but not with all of our attention.

We need to have a gaze, an eye, towards heaven, towards spiritual things. In Colossians chapter 3, verse 1, Paul says this, If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.

Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. And he's using a little bit of exaggeration because we do need to have our minds somewhat focused on the things of earth, but don't just focus on earthly things.

[30 : 33] We need our gaze set upward to the heavens where he says we were raised with Christ.

You see, the disciples, they were focused on what? On an earthly kingdom for Israel that was to come. It was a future kingdom that Jesus said was at hand.

And there were things that Jesus was teaching them about the requirements to enter into that kingdom. It wasn't just automatic. There were these things that you had to do to enter the kingdom.

Pay attention. This is important. That was the life and the ministry of the disciples. But for us, in the age of grace in which we live, there are still things future, right?

But the primary attention that we need to give is to something in the past. something that Jesus accomplished for us already.

[31 : 37] Our focus is on something that's already done. On a work that Jesus Christ finished for us. That he completed for us. We need to focus on our union with Christ.

On our identity with him. On all the benefits that we have because we live our lives in Christ. Christ. And that is where our attention and our focus should be as we go through life taking care of all the mundane, earthly matters.

Our attention, our focus, our energy shouldn't just be on those things. But on remembering who we are in Christ. What he has done for us.

And on the life with God that we look forward to in heaven. So let's talk about leaven. And specifically the leaven of the Pharisees.

That was what Jesus' original lesson was about. He wanted to warn them about the leaven of the Pharisees. And then there was like this distraction about food. And then Jesus kind of went off on that.

[32 : 46] It later says that they finally understood what he meant by the leaven of the Pharisees. But let's talk about that here. So again we said leaven is just yeast.

And yeast is this little thing. It's bacteria, right? Or something like that. Some living organism. And how much leaven do you put in something?

Do you need to put a cup of leaven into bread? Would you put a teaspoon in? No. You just put, what do they call it, a pinch? Just a little pinch of leaven.

And that little tiny bit of leaven was to do. In an hour it will spread through the entire loaf. A huge loaf of bread. And so leaven was symbolic of something that infects.

It spreads. There were a couple of times where Jesus used leaven as a symbol of something positive. He said that the kingdom of God was like leaven.

[33 : 48] He was talking about how the kingdom of God would spread throughout all the world. But most of the time when Jesus mentioned leaven he was talking about something very negative.

A corrupting influence. And that's what Jesus is talking about here. So what is specifically the leaven of the Pharisees?

What is it about the Pharisees that we should take heed of? That we should be aware of? I think there are two references. One we just read in Matthew chapter 16 which is the same account and verse 12.

It says this. Matthew chapter 16 verse 12. Then they understood that he did not tell them to beware of the leaven of bread but of the doctrine of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

So there are two things that I'm going to point out to be aware of with the Pharisees. The first one is their doctrine. And remember when we talked about the Pharisees before what was Jesus most critical about the Pharisees?

[34 : 53] It was their traditions. Their traditions that were man-made. Not just any tradition but traditions that undermined the word of God.

They actually undermined the word of God. There are some traditions that can be fine. They might actually promote the word of God.

You could have a tradition of reading the Bible with your family every morning. That's a wonderful tradition. But he was seeing all these traditions from the Pharisees that undermined God's word.

The second one here is in Luke chapter 12 verse 1. It says this. In the meantime when an innumerable multitude of people had gathered together so that they trampled one another he began to say to his disciples first of all beware of the leaven of the Pharisees which is hypocrisy.

False doctrine. The traditions of men. Number two hypocrisy. That was the other big thing that Jesus railed against the Pharisees for.

[36 : 05] You hypocrites. You hypocrites. Jesus I think it's in Matthew 23 is it?

Where Jesus there's a lot of the woes. It's the woes of Jesus. Woe to you you Pharisees you hypocrites. He says you travel over a mountain to convert one sinner and you end up making him twice as much a son of hell.

He says. He talks about their prayers that they do in public yet on the inside they're full of dead men's bones. False doctrine.

Traditions of men. And hypocrisy. Those were the two big things with the Pharisees. But there are three groups that are mentioned.

And it's the Pharisees, the Sadducees, and he mentions Herod. So let's talk just briefly about that. The Pharisees, as you may know already, but was a majority Jewish sect among the Jews.

[37 : 14] You might think of it as like a denomination today. They had certain teachings that they taught in a way that they interpreted the Jewish scriptures and they were called the Pharisees and there were teachers among them.

They were considered the conservatives. They're the ones who took the Bible literally. And that's typically a sign of a conservative, somebody who takes their teachings literally.

The Sadducees, they were the liberals. And do we see the same thing today among religious people? Christians even, right? You have the conservatives and they tend to take the Bible more literally.

And the liberals, they're a little bit more loose with how you interpret things. They interpret more figuratively, metaphorically. This is really a distinctive of a liberal in any age and any time.

What does he mean by Herod? Be careful of Herod. Well, I think, and this is somewhat conjecture, that he's talking about the Herodians.

[38 : 20] And he does mention Herodians in other parts of the scripture. In fact, it says, and we actually read this in Mark chapter 3, that after, when the Pharisees first got into contact with Jesus, that after their interaction with him, it says in Mark 3, 6, it says, the Pharisees went out and immediately plotted with the Herodians against him, how they might destroy him.

So the Pharisees plotted with the Herodians. Now, one thing to know about the Pharisees and the Herodians, they were not on the same page. These were people who were at odds with each other.

The Herodians were a group of people, and there's not a lot of clarity, because most of what we know about the Herodians is from the Bible. There's a little bit from some early church writers, early Christian writers, but most of it comes from what we read in the Bible.

So there's a couple of possibilities of who he means by Herod or the Herodians. He could be talking about the members and the officials that are part of the Herodian dynasty.

That was the kind of ruling, the people that ruled the Jews. Or he could have been talking about the political supporters. You might think of it like a political party, like we have today, Republicans and Democrats.

[39 : 40] Are you a Herodian, or are you something else? What are your political views on Rome and the dynasty of Herod?

But one thing we know about all three of these groups is that all three of them oppose the ministry of Jesus. And we saw here in Mark 3 that they actually conspired together. These are groups that are at odds with each other.

Think about Republicans and Democrats. Do they ever work together on anything? Almost never, right? But there is this one instance here where these three groups, all three of them, conspire together against Jesus.

So what is the application here? So you have groups, and there's hypocrisy, and there's false doctrine and traditions of men.

The application that I'd like to look at this morning is the dangers that there are in man-made groups and the tendency towards corruption.

[40 : 46] And that's what heaven is a symbol of, corruption. Both religious groups and political groups. The Pharisees and the Sadducees were the two religious groups, and the people of Herod, the Herodians, it was a political group.

And those groups, religious groups and political groups, are they always separate, or there's some overlap, right? A lot of times the state likes to get involved in church matters.

And church matters like to get involved in the state. That's not necessarily always wrong, but there is overlap. One thing that I think is important for us to note is that every group that has ever existed from the dawn of time, every man-made group, has always tended towards corruption.

Not just most groups, every single one. And we can see that through just history. You know, one of the things that has been in the news lately is Harvard University.

Right? There was some kind of something in the Congress, or some kind of, I'm not sure exactly what it was. The president of Harvard was being questioned about attitudes in their university towards the Jews.

[42 : 09] And what she said was shocking. But that's just one example of the corruption that is in Harvard. Harvard was established as what?

A Christian seminary for people to be taught the scriptures and to go out and preach the gospel. Is Harvard that way anymore?

Not at all. Harvard is known as a place full of corruption that teaches all kinds of vile, godless things. And is Harvard the only example?

You look at any group throughout history and eventually, some groups are just started on a bad footing, on a bad foundation, right? But even any group that has started on a good foundation with the right values and the right vision and the right mission will always tend towards corruption.

But there is an appeal to being part of groups, right? There are advantages. You can have more influence. You can accomplish more things.

[43 : 18] And we all want to be part of something bigger than ourselves, right? And if you can join this group over here in some kind of mission, you can accomplish more than if you just do something on your own. And that's good.

And that's actually fine, right? To join together. The Bible even talks about that in Proverbs, about three cords are not quickly broken. If you just try to do something on your own, you know, you could be defeated.

But if you join with others, you can actually accomplish more. So, you see this group called the Sadducees and they're spreading their relativistic, woke ideology throughout all of Israel.

And so, let's fight against the Sadducees and I'm going to join the Pharisees. We're going to fight against the Sadducees. bring in some conservative theology.

The Romans, they're creeping in on our Jewish traditions and our laws. And so, let's join the party of Herod. Well, he's not the greatest, but hey, it's better than the Romans.

[44 : 29] Maybe we can make something out of this. So, there are political groups. Today, we have Republican and Democrat. Democrats are destroying our country.

So, let's join with the Republicans to conserve our freedom and our values. And here's a group and they have the power and the resources and the influence to actually make a difference.

But, do political groups ever decay? Are there ever any problems?

Today, you know, if you're paying attention, there's a battle for the soul of the Republican Party and you look at what the Republican Party stands for and I think most Christians would look at that platform and the things that are being promoted and fought for are all good things that Christians should stand for.

But then you see some of the things going on and you see decay, corruption. You see the same thing in religious groups.

[45 : 41] We talked about denominations. And I don't think denominations are bad in and of themselves, but there are so many examples throughout history. Denominations, even the ones that started great.

You think about the United Methodists. They started out from the revivals of John Wesley and people were following his teachings and not all the things that John Wesley taught were very good, but these were people who were on fire to try to serve the Lord.

Committed to the teachings of the Scriptures and upholding the authority of the Scriptures. Is that what the United Methodist denomination is doing in general today?

No way, Jose. In fact, there's a huge battle right now where so many individual churches are leaving the United Methodists because they have, as a organization, decided that they're going to promote sexual perversion and same-sex marriage and all kinds of deviancy.

Many of those churches should have left a long time ago. They're just now making that decision to do so. And why?

[46 : 59] Why? But there's a pressure, there's a seduction, a temptation to stay in the group. We can do more, we can have more of an impact, we can feed more people, we can reach more people with our teachings.

But if those teachings are corrupt, is it of any value? Some are seduced by, well, the pastoral pension that I have or the real estate that our church has.

If we leave the denomination, we have to give that real estate back to the denomination. And so people have to make decisions. Am I going to go with the word of God?

Or am I going to hold on to power and influence? You see the same thing with Christian universities. There is, I don't know how many Christian universities there are out there, dozens, dozens of them.

And how many of them are faithful in just the bare minimum basics of teaching the gospel and basic, standard Christian morality?

[48 : 13] Half a dozen, maybe, out of around 100? Maybe half a dozen. So there's a danger to man-made groups.

And here's what happens. A group starts with a good mission, with good values, with a good vision to fight for righteousness or freedom or the gospel or whatever it might be.

And over time, whether, over time, that mission changes. And it's not always overt. It's not always even conscious. But the mission changes from the base values, from the core values that they started with to the number one priority being the preservation of power of this group.

And do we see that with the Sadducees and the Pharisees and the Herodians? We want to preserve the Pharisees specifically, right? The Pharisees especially.

They're looking to preserve their power. regardless of what's actually true, what's actually righteous. And so, when you're part of a group and your focus is on and your loyalties are to the group, you end up making all kinds of excuses for, well, we're just going to let that slide.

[49 : 49] We must win the election or this power play at all costs.

But win for what? What is it that we want to preserve? It ends up just being the group. So we become hypocrites just like the set, just like the Pharisees.

we need our commitment not to a group, though we can join groups and be part of groups and we actually should.

In fact, this local church is a group, isn't it? It's one that the Bible advocates and honors the forming of a local church of believers to come together.

But Jesus said, take heed, beware. Look out for changes to the mission, to the doctrine.

[50 : 54] A lot of times it starts with just ignoring important things. You don't talk about those things. We're not going to talk about the gospel. Look out for hypocrisy.

Are the leaders of my church, are the leaders of this group saying one thing and doing another? And what do you do if you see a problem?

The temptation is, and I've seen this, I've seen this with big mega churches. They get large, influential in the community, which is amazing. Wouldn't you love as our church to have a lot of influence in the community?

That would be great, right? We have some, right? But you can always have more. You think, well, I see this corruption going on, but if I just ignore it, well, think of all the good things that we can do as a group.

And we need to take heed to that temptation. We see something, you can do one of two things. say something, make a protest.

[52 : 11] That's actually what we see with the Catholic Church, right? There was a protest. Martin Luther, when he protested, he actually wasn't looking to leave the Catholic Church. He was actually just wanting to make a stink to try to change things.

Ultimately, that didn't work out. They had to start something completely new. So protest, see if we can make the change, but two, sometimes you just have to go. Start over.

So, we can look for and justify overlooking sin and decay and unrighteousness in the group that we're a part of.

so that we can maintain that power and influence, justifying ourselves of all the good things that we can do. We need to beware of leaven and do something about it.

Power is not the most important thing and I think if there's anything we learn from the ministry of Jesus, it's that righteousness is so much more important than power. Did Jesus seek, at least in his three-year ministry on earth, did he seek for power to get the accolades of everybody?

[53 : 35] Now, the number one thing was righteousness and truth and that should be what our commitment is to. Amen? Let's close on a word of prayer. Father, we love you, we thank you for the scriptures, what they teach us.

I ask that you would help us to apply the things that we learn, that we have learned today from your word to our own lives and consider how we may in certain circumstances overlook certain things because we might justify ourselves in looking for influence and power in a group that we might be a part of.

We ask that you would focus our minds, help us to focus our minds also on what you've done for us, what you've accomplished, not to always be caught up in earthly things but to have our minds focused on you throughout all the different things that we must do in life to care for ourselves and for others.

We ask you these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Thank you, everybody. Oh, and Happy New Year! Happy New Year!