

Exegetical Notes, Matthew 16:1-12
“Be Careful”

Prepared by Charles H. Jensen, Pastor, Cornerstone Fellowship
101 Kylies Road, Coatesville, PA 19329
610-384-1375
charleshjensen@aol.com

Matthew 16:1-12

Verse 1

The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven.

- The Pharisees were the religious conservatives of Jesus’ day. The Sadducees were the theological liberals of the time. Great differences separated these groups. However, despite their differences, they were united in their opposition to Jesus.
- In this instance, they have joined forces to “test” Jesus. Their intention is to devise a situation that will expose Him, publicly, as a fraud they believe Him to be.
- They request, “a sign from heaven.” They have already received signs in the form of the miracles and healings that Jesus did. However, their contention is that, while these things show that Jesus has remarkable powers, they do not prove that His authority and power comes from God. He could do these things by the power of Satan is their contention. Therefore, they ask Him to give them proof that comes directly from God, “a sign from heaven.”

Verse 2-3

He replied, “When evening comes, you say, ‘It will be fair weather, for the sky is red’ and in the morning, ‘Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.’ You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.

- “Red sky at night, sailor’s delight. Red sky in the morning, sailor’s take warning.” Jesus seems to be quoting the old adage. This was apparently the common wisdom of ancient times and was familiar to those of Jesus’ day.

- Jesus tells them that while they know the conventional wisdom related to the weather, they do not understand what is happening right before their eyes.

Verse 4

A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.” Jesus then left them and went away.

- These people are considered “wicked and adulterous” by Jesus because their request for a sign comes from unbelief. They do not really want a sign that would prove who Jesus was. What they want is no sign because that will confirm what they believe. Their request for a sign, then, is dishonest. Even if such a sign were given, they would discredit it.
- The “sign of Jonah” is explained in Matthew 12:39-40. There it says, “For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth”. The sign they seek is the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The sign will come, but not in their time. The sign they seek will come in God’s time. However, they will reject it, claiming that it is not the proof they needed.
- Thus, Jesus refused their test and left them. He said that a sign would come, the “sign of Jonah.” However, it would not come at their demand.

Verse 5

When they went across the lake, the disciples forgot to take bread.

- This is a transitional line. It connects the story being told with the story that was just finished. That story was the story of the feeding of the 4,000. Jesus multiplied the bread because the crowd had run out. Now the disciples were again in that situation. Due to their own negligence, they were out of bread.

Verse 6

“Be careful,” Jesus said to them, “Be on guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and the Sadducees.”

- Given the concern about bread Jesus uses the opportunity to make a point about the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

- In the Bible, yeast is often used as a symbol for sin. It could be so interpreted here. Jesus could be warning the disciples to keep clear of the sin of these people. However, it is more likely that He is concerned about the wider influence of these apparently religious people, and warning the disciples to stay away from them.

Verse 7

They discussed this among themselves and said, “It is because we didn’t bring any bread.”

- Once again the disciples are focused on the limitations of the situation. Even though they have just witnessed the feeding of the 4000 they are still concerned about bread and their failure to bring bread with them.

Verse 8

Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, “You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread?”

- There is nothing that escapes Jesus’ notice. So He knows about their discussion and its topic.
- He attempts to lift their eyes from the obvious problem, the lack of bread, to more important realities.

Verse 9-10

Do you still not understand? Don’t you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered?

- Jesus reminds them of what they have recently experienced. See Matthew 14:13-21 and Matthew 15:29-39. They should know the unlimited power of Jesus from these experiences and should have learned that they need not worry about food.

Verse 11

How is it you don’t understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

- Jesus tells them that He is not talking about physical bread and then repeats His warning about the Pharisees and Sadducees. See verse 6.

Verse 12

Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

- These apparently powerful and respected religious teachers of Jesus' day were teaching error, not in all things, but as related to Him, His identity, and His part in God's plan. Therefore, Jesus warns His disciples not to listen to their misguided teaching.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon entitled *Be Careful*. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen, Senior Pastor at Cornerstone Fellowship, Coatesville Pennsylvania. All rights are reserved by *Cornerstone Fellowship* & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. They are used here by permission.)