

Matthew 16.1-12 | what is in your bread

Intro | Gluten

Last Wednesday, as we began to lead the men's weekly Bible study, what was a **20 year never-puke streak** came to an end—20 years down the toilet...literally. In the days following, I had some *violent fetal-position digestive* issues seemingly unrelated to food poisoning or a virus. As I evaluated my diet, there was only one consistent element: BREAD. **Had God chosen to curse me for my unrelenting mockery of all things organic, whole-grain, and genetically un-modified?** Did my stomach feel like a balloon full of glass twisted in knots because **I was allergic to gluten?**

The 'G' word; up until about a decade ago, 99% of us had never heard of the word gluten. In truth, mankind has been eating wheat, and the gluten in it, for at least ten thousand years. Gluten is one of the most heavily consumed proteins on earth created when two particular molecules form a bond in bread making. As bakers knead dough, this bond creates an elastic membrane, which is what gives bread its chewy texture and permits pizza chefs to toss and twirl the dough into the air. Gluten also traps carbon dioxide, which, as ferments, adds volume causing the loaf to rise. Essentially, gluten is an unseen catalyst that, by its very presence, causes change and makes an increasing number of people sick (1 in 133).

Jesus and Bread

Why am I talking about puke streaks, pizza, and proteins? GOD LIKES BREAD. From beginning to end, bread plays an important role in God's story and in Jesus teaching. In Scripture, bread was used to miraculously feed the Israelites who fled Egypt, bread was used in consecrating the priests, bread was used to represent God's presence in the temple, bread was used as a sacrifice of thanksgiving, bread was used as a memorialize redemption, bread was used by Jesus to identify himself as the giver of life, and bread was used by Jesus to symbolize the new covenant which accomplished it. **And, over the last two chapters, we've seen Jesus perform two miracles with bread to feed the people physically while pointing to a spiritual feast yet to come.**

Following these miracles, representatives from the largest "religious" factions approach Jesus to TEST him—prove Him a false teacher. The proof He has already offered is unsatisfying; they want other signs—for God to come down in a shaft of light and say "This is my Son". Despite all of their religious training they are blind to the spiritual meaning of Jesus' signs. Despite all of their knowledge of Scripture, they are clueless to Jesus identity. All of their religion and love for Scripture has produced one thing: PRIDE. **They do not come to Jesus ASKING, they come DEMANDING proof.** Jesus observes how they are excellent weathermen but horrible teachers. **Jesus rebukes them for their spiritual blindness (I AM RESPONSIBLE), condemns them as adulterers (I AM SINFUL), and then leaves them to be with his disciples (I AM LOST).**

The Warning about Leaven

After leaving, He then warns his disciples to beware the **GLUTEN of Pharisees and Sadducees**. Just as the Pharisees and Sadducees are blind, the disciples struggle to understand what Jesus is talking about. Having left their seven baskets of leftovers on the shore somewhere, they are confused by Jesus warning—**we don't have any bread with us**. With their eyes, ears, and hearts fixed on the flesh, they don't even consider the possibility that there is spiritual meaning behind Jesus words. And if men who ministered side by side with Jesus for three years were blind to reality of the spiritual world, then how much more do we fail in this same way. **Like the disciples, we are apt to dismiss spiritual truth, even the very whisperings of Jesus because they don't sound spiritual.** Some of the most powerful spiritual messages come through ordinary everyday things. We're often blind to the Spirit because we're not expecting Him.

Matthew makes the point to show that Jesus is “AWARE” of their bread-less-ness, basically making the density of the disciples that much thicker. **Jesus tells them their FAITH IS SMALL.** Jesus challenges his disciples’ lack of discernment by charging them to **REMEMBER the two feeds that just occurred.** Yes, disciples often suffer from amnesia—we forget who Jesus is and what He has done. But, Jesus here does not want his disciples to simply remember the FACT of the miracles, but the NATURE of them. The feedings proved that God does not work according to realistic calculations or rationalistic odds. Less is more. Smaller is bigger. Weakness is power. THINGS ARE NOT AS THEY SEEM—**there is more going on.**

Isn’t that the story behind the Christmas story? This isn’t simply a teenage mom giving birth to a boy in a cave; this is a chosen women bringing our Lord and King into the world He created. There is much more going on...there is always much more going on. **The DISCIPLES fail to see that JESUS IS NOT TALKING ABOUT BREAD.** Just as Jesus is “feeding something” spiritual through his bread the Pharisees and Sadducees are “feeding something” spiritual through theirs. **There is something bad in their bread.**

Two Kinds of “Bad” Leaven

In the Old Testament leaven is consistently used to represent sin, false truth, and evil. Similarly, in the New Testament, Jesus uses Leaven to identify false teaching and unbelief. Here, Jesus does not warn his disciples about BREAD...but about leaven that is IN BREAD. We are horrible at evaluating the goodness or badness of the bread we eat because we never ask if it is “GLUTEN FREE”. **If it looks good I’ll eat it. If it tastes good, I’ll eat it. If it smells good, I’ll eat it. What if what looks good, tastes good, and smells good, has something inside that is slowly killing you.** Jesus warns his disciples about two specific kinds of false teaching that imitate truth, much like Wonder bread imitates real bread—the religious teaching of the Pharisees and the teaching the Sadducees:

The leaven of the Pharisees | The Pharisees were mostly middle-class businessmen, and therefore were influential with the common man. Though they were a minority in the Sanhedrin and held a minority number of positions as priests, they seemed to control the decision making because they had the support of the people. The Pharisees were the conservative religious guys who **separated from culture.** While doctrinally sound in many ways and committed to God’s Word, they became even more devoted to traditions of men they created to “help” uphold that word. **They were SUPER-SPIRITUAL men of rules and rituals.** Even though they look like they love God, they wrongly emphasized something they must do for God over what God had done for us. **Pharisees were the hypocritical and hypercritical fundamentalists. They were PROUD of their moral greatness.**

The leaven of the Sadducees | The Sadducees were aristocrats. They tended to be wealthy and held powerful positions, including that of chief priests and high priest, and they held the majority of the 70 seats of the ruling council called the Sanhedrin. They worked hard to keep the peace by agreeing with the decisions of Rome, and they seemed to be more concerned with politics than religion. Basically, the Sadducees were the liberal religious guys who immersed themselves into the culture. They accommodated the culture until they compromised God’s truth. If the Pharisees were super-spiritual, **the Sadducees were SUPER-SECULAR men of power and politics.** Though religious, their teaching denied: God’s involvement in daily life; the resurrection of the dead; the existence of a spiritual world, namely angels and demons; and the reality of an afterlife, namely, eternal punishment. Sadducees were the Today, we’d recognize open, affirming, doctrine denying Universalists. **They were PROUD of their social greatness.**

They both used Scripture, they both offered up “Bible bread”. One loved the Bible too much, the other not enough. ; the other love. Ironically, the Pharisees and the Sadducees hated one another. Yet, they are

able to find unity in their disdain for Jesus Christ. Jesus threatens their power, the prosperity, and their popularity. All of these movements want something more than Jesus. None of these movements find total and complete satisfaction in the gospel, namely, the Jesus Christ crucified and resurrected.

The Effects of “Bad” Leaven

Bad leaven produces bad Christianity that is unbiblical, unhealthy, and unable to save. In His letter to the Galatians, Paul warned. ⁹ **A little leaven leavens the whole lump. A little leaven...it doesn't take much to get off us off of the gospel. Leaven works slow, but it works and produce bread. The danger of bad leaven is that it still has the power to give rise.** In other words, a Christian and even a church can grow with bad leaven. Bad bread will keep you alive for a while, but it will never satisfy, and it will always kill you in the end. Bad leaven produces bad bread that is feasted upon and fed to others. In produces people who are like either Pharisees or Sadducees:

1. PUFFED UP with criticism toward others.
2. PUFFED UP with a fear of the world's approval.
3. PUFFED UP with a yearning for earthly power.
4. PUFFED UP with a craving for material prosperity.
5. PUFFED UP with a concern for external ritual
6. PUFFED UP with a pride in one's self-righteousness
7. PUFFED UP with a suspicion for grace.

The Antidote to Bad Gluten | Jesus & Unleavened Bread

The solution is not to find the best bread with the best leaven. We must be careful how we apply this text or become guilty of the very thing that Jesus is warning us about. **We must not be like the Pharisee-conservative** and teach DO NOT EAT BREAD. **We must not be like the Sadducee-liberal** and teach IT DOESN'T MATTER WHAT YOU EAT. Paul tells us in his letter to the Corinthians what we must eat bread, but a particular kind: ⁷ **Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. ⁸ Let us therefore celebrate the festival, not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the **unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. Feasting on the unleavened bread, which is Christ,****

Jesus is called UNLEAVENED BREAD—bread without leaven—bread without sin. **How do we know if we are eating bad leaven? How do we know if the teaching we receive, from the pulpit or popular culture, is true? WHERE DOES IT LEAD? WHAT DOES IT GIVE RISE TO? How do you know if you're eating unleavened bread? It leads to Jesus and you remain FLAT.** Unleavened bread in us is Jesus in us. Jesus in us gives rise to humility. Jesus in us gives rise to a love for God. Jesus in us gives rise to gratitude toward God. Jesus in us gives rise to a desire to serve others. Jesus in us gives rise to compassion toward others. Jesus in us gives rise to a hope beyond this world. Good bread gives rise to a true satisfaction of our hunger.

We are to feast on the unleavened bread of the gospel. Only when we see that how our SINLESS KING humbled himself to die for our sins, will we s humble enough, flat enough, to declare our need for Him. Jesus does not save the good and powerful, only those willing to admit they are bad and weak. And upon that confession, you begin to feast on “THE BREAD OF LIFE”.

John 6.35-40 | ³⁵ Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. ³⁶ But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. ³⁷ All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. ³⁸ For I have

come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. ⁴⁰ For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”