

“Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees!” (verse 11b) (I.e. Yucky yeast)

- Be on your guard = conflict language (battle grammar)
- 1 Peter 5:8-9a, NLT

Here is something we often forget about discipleship (being Jesus followers)

- We are in a battle (we live in a state of battle) (warfare existence)
- Because we have a real enemy (the devil) (Ephesians 6:10-12, NIV)

We have seen confrontations with the devil and demons a lot in Matthew

- But here is a different sort of confrontation with evil
 - One that is directly affecting the disciples (forming the way they think, and act toward Jesus)
- “Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees!”
 - **What is the evil influence (the yeast) Jesus wants His followers to be on guard against?**

Let's back up and get a little context... Who are the Pharisees and Sadducees?

- They were the two parties that ruled the religious and social life of Israel
- Together they made up the Sanhedrin (Cf. Congress and Dems and Reps)
- **The Pharisees**
 - Conservatives
 - “separated ones”
 - Luke 18:11, NIV sums up their attitude
 - Believed in strict adherence to the Law of Moses and the Jewish traditions in order to gain entrance into heaven
- **The Sadducees**
 - Liberal, modernists (versus the Pharisees as traditionalists)
 - Did not believe in a heaven (as a place we go), but rather that this life was all there was (22:23)
 - Wealthy class concerned with politics and social change
- These parties were united against Jesus...
- Both of them failed (refused?) to recognize Jesus
- Jesus often condemned them and their **influence** in Israel (as He does here)
- Cf. Jesus tells His followers to **guard against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees** (v. 12)

They had many teachings (they were the religious teachers of Israel)

- But, what specific **teaching** (influence) is Jesus alluding to in this interaction?
- I do not think it is so much a particular teaching per say (like a singular lesson/doctrine) as it is the way the way **the Pharisees and Sadducees negatively influenced others through their ungodly, unfaithful skepticism**

See how this plays out in the text:

- They came **testing** Jesus by asking Him to show them a **sign from heaven** (verse 1)
 - In John's gospel the concept of Jesus' **signs** had to do with miracles full of deep spiritual significance (I.e. they pointed to a deeper meaning)
 - In the Synoptic Gospels, **signs** denote impressive miracles that **accredited the person who performed them**¹ (Cf. **attesting miracles**)
 - A **sign from heaven** = a miracle that would prove the God was truly with Jesus and He was from God
 - Heaven = sky here (?) = Something God-sized
 - Cf. Joshua 10:13-14, NIV
- **KEY:** They did not come in **true faith** thinking Jesus may be the God of Israel... **they came to test him**
 - The verb is usually negative in connotation = in order to see Him fail
 - It signifies that they were not sincere in their seeking a **sign from the sky**

¹ Leon Morris, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 413.

In **verse 3** Jesus calls them out for knowing how to discern things like **weather patterns** though observing the appearance of the **sky** – but failing to observe the evidence of who Jesus was

- “You possess indeed an **understanding based upon experience**, to pass a **discriminating judgment** upon the face of the sky, but on the other hand, with reference to the attesting miracles... are you not able to pass a **discriminating judgment?**” –Kenneth S. Wuest, *The New Testament: An Expanded Translation*

Then Jesus reveals them for what they really were (see **verse 4**)

- They were **wicked** and **adulterous** because they refused to **understand** and **acknowledge** the truth
- Jesus tells them that the **ultimate sign** would be His resurrection—the **sign of Jonah** (**Romans 1:2-4**, NIV)
- Then: **Jesus left them and went away**

The issue that surfaces in the text, and what we need to be learn from, is the fact that this **spirit of disbelief** was pervasive in Israel's culture and had even affected the disciples

Read verses 5-8 (verse 9a is key)

- Notice again the **conflict, battle** language: **Be on your guard against...**
- **Yeast/Leaven/Teaching** = the insidious and pervasive influence of the religious leaders (**i.e. faithlessness**)
 - That caused the disciples to **not think right and well** about Jesus
 - Really it came down to a lack of trust/faith that failed to understand and **remember** (Cf. v. 9a)
 - “**Do you still not understand? Don't you remember...**” –Jesus

This is a pretty basic interaction, with profound implications

- It was about bread and whether or not that was the issue
- But it was actually about trust, and followers of Jesus living out of a place of **understanding** and **remembering**

The disciples should have been living out of the place of **understanding** and **remembering** the feedings

- That Jesus was able to provide bread and that He Himself is the Bread of Life
- When they forgot that, they would not be seeing life rightly
- They were fearful about silly things (**bread**) rather than hearing what Jesus was really saying

They had been **negatively influenced** by the **religious but faithless** in their culture (a battle)

- **Be on your guard against** such influences (notice, the **yucky yeast** was **from within** Israel) (**2 Peter 2:1**, NLT)
 - Choose friends, teachers, books, pastors, leaders that will increase faith
- **Be on your guard against** teaching/influences that **doubt God, dismiss Jesus, and devalue Scripture**
 - A **battle with evil** for truth and faith! (**1 Tim. 4:1**, NLT)
 - The yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees was strangely contagious (smart and influential)
 - You be contagious with faith and truth! (**2 Timothy 4:2-5**, NLT)
 - Surround yourselves with influences that build up faith and trust (**Jude 17-20**, NLT)

Faithlessness lives out of fear and misses Jesus, but faith lives out of trust and sees Christ as present with us

Functioning from a place of what we know about Jesus: (Cf. **Understand** and **Remember**)

- Loves us
- Gave Himself for us (no more wrath)
- Called us (to Himself and to follow)
 - To be **faithless** in this sense is to live and act in such a way as though Jesus was not these things
 - Cf. Functional Atheist
- **Proverbs 2:2-6** and **10-11**, NLT
- Cf. **Understand** and **Remember**
- With us (Immanuel)
- Faithful
- Compassionate, etc, etc

Surround yourself with faithful influences.

Be a person of faith that influences faithfulness.