

# Signs of Life, Time & God

Thomas Robinson, *The Suffering & Glory of Life in Jesus*, 1, June 22, 2014

**Matthew 16:1-17** (*Jesus has just crossed the lake after feeding the four thousand...*)

<sup>1</sup> And the **Pharisees and Sadducees** came, and to test him they asked him to show them **a sign from heaven.**

<sup>2</sup> He answered them, "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the **heaven is red.**' <sup>3</sup> And in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the **heaven is red and threatening.**' You know how to interpret the **face of the heaven**, but you cannot interpret the **signs of the times.**

So he left them and departed. <sup>5</sup> When the disciples reached the other side, they had forgotten to bring any bread. <sup>6</sup> Jesus said to them, "**Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.**"

<sup>7</sup> And they began discussing it among themselves, saying, "We brought no bread."

<sup>8</sup> But Jesus, aware of this, said, "**O you of little faith**, why are you discussing among yourselves the fact that you have no bread? <sup>9</sup> **Do you not yet perceive?** Do you not **remember** the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? <sup>10</sup> Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? <sup>11</sup> How is it that you **fail to understand** that I did not speak about bread? **Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.**"

<sup>12</sup> Then they understood that he did **not** tell them to beware of **the leaven of bread**, but of **the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.**

<sup>13</sup> Now when Jesus came into the district of **Caesarea Philippi**, he asked his disciples, "**Who do people say that the Son of Man is?**"

<sup>14</sup> And they said, "Some say **John the Baptist**, others say **Elijah**, and others **Jeremiah** or one of the **prophets.**"

<sup>15</sup> He said to them, "**But who do you say that I am?**"

<sup>16</sup> Simon Peter replied, "**You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.**"

<sup>17</sup> And Jesus answered him, "**Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah!** For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but **my Father who is in heaven.**"

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**Matthew 12:38-41**

<sup>38</sup> Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, **we wish to see a sign** from you." <sup>39</sup> But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except **the sign of the prophet Jonah.** <sup>40</sup> For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. <sup>41</sup> The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, **something greater than Jonah is here.**"

**Matthew 13:15**

<sup>15</sup> "For this people's **heart has grown dull**, and with their **ears** they can **barely hear**, and their **eyes** they have **closed**, lest they should **see** with their eyes and **hear** with their ears and **understand** with their heart and turn, and **I would heal them.**"

**Matthew 13:33**

<sup>33</sup> He told them another parable. "The **kingdom of heaven is like leaven** that a woman took and hid in three measures of flour, till it was all leavened."

## Signs, Signs, Give Me a Sign!

Matthew is leading us into central turning points in the Gospel: Peter's famous confession, Jesus' transfiguration, his journey to Jerusalem. He wants us to have our eyes open.

Thus the focus on signs. We're experts on signs. We're surrounded by them. Saturated. Go to Times Square. What do the signs mean? Buy me. You're at the center. Great city. Stop.

Political signs, facial signs, baseball signs, cultural signs, direction signs. Where are we?

Pharisees and Sadducees don't agree on much except the threat of Jesus. People are making great claims about Jesus. They see signs it's demonic. Pharisees: a threat to the holiness of a pure remnant. Sadducees: a threat to the Temple. All they want is a sign from heaven!

Jesus says, heaven is not the problem. Can you see/understand the Signs of the Times? The signs of Israel's situation. The signs that show God's direction: serving, opening eyes, healing, feeding, permeating like leaven, growing like mustard seed. Signs of the Messiah.

The very demand shows blindness: God doesn't give signs on demand. He gives you Jonah!

## There's Leaven, and then There's Leaven.

Jesus crosses the lake again with his disciples. Jesus gives them (and us) a serious warning about what they've just witnessed: *"Beware the leaven of the Pharisees & Sadducees!"*

Then it's like Keystone Cops: Disciples so worried about making a mistake, getting it right with Jesus, that they miss the point on the other side. *Leaven...Bread...oh no! We failed!*

Jesus calms them down, reminds them (and us) of what they've experienced. We've seen the leaven & mustard seed of the Kingdom of Heaven, where the Messiah serves, the lowly are healed, feeding multiplies the more its done. Jesus is not worried about stuff, but about opening eyes, ears, hearts. Jesus reminds but doesn't explain. Think! Look! See!

Then Matthew helps us out by explaining. He knows we're a lot like the disciples. We're often so concerned with not making a mistake, imagining that we can become a just right community on our own, that we miss what God is doing: Healing our bodies and our brokenness and mistakes, feeding our deepest hunger, meeting us outside the temple. There are different kinds of leaven that permeate. Beware the Pharisees' kind.

## Who is the Son of Man? Who am I? Who are You?

They're traveling again. Now to the source of the Jordan at Caesarea Philippi (the local ruler and the Roman emperor). At this Spring of fresh water/center of Emperor cult, Jesus asks about how people identify "the Son of Man" – Jesus, the human, the visionary embodiment of Israel who receives God's kingdom (Dan 7:13).

Their response shows many people have been watching for signs of deliverance and hope.

No one says, "A really interesting teacher, a good rabbi." All the answers involve miracle, prophetic fulfillment, hope beyond hope. The recently executed John the Baptist, raised. Elijah, the great prophet who didn't die, but would return before the day of the Lord.

Jeremiah, the great prophet of the exile who told of the day of a new covenant with God.

"*Who do you say that I am?*" Jesus turns personal and direct. Simon the Rock rises to the occasion: "*You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.*" Jesus is God's anointed king.

The one who carries God's promise to David: "I will be a father to him and he will be a son to me" (2 Sam 7:14). He says far more than he knows. His confession is itself a sign.

Jesus plays on his name: son of John. You've shown who you are. A son of Jonah. Remade, brought back to life, one through whom God does more than he knows: a Disciple.