

Intro

This morning we continue to examine the nature of faith.

We've seen the anti-faith, the scribes and Pharisees. They've seen and heard enough to believe. They've seen indisputable healings, but they opposed Jesus because healings occurred on the Sabbath (12:9-14). They've seen demons cast out, but they attributed Jesus' power to Satan instead of the Father (12:22-32). Despite what they've seen, they're still making demands. They are the anti-faith. They won't believe. They can't see. Nothing will convince them.

We've seen little faith. The disciples were at sea in the middle of a storm while Jesus was asleep in the boat (8:23-27). They saw Jesus perform many miracles, but they didn't trust that he'd keep them safe during a storm. Later the disciples were at sea in another storm, while Jesus was praying on a mountain (14:22-33). Jesus walked on water and Peter began to walk on the water, but sank when he saw the wind. In both cases, Jesus rebuked his disciples for little faith. Their trust was mixed with doubt.

Two weeks ago we saw the great faith of Canaanite woman (15:21-28). She trusted Jesus to heal her demon-possessed daughter. She was confident in Jesus' ability and mercy. When Jesus tested her and played hard to get she persisted in faith.

This morning we see anti-faith and little faith pop up again.

READ PASSAGE

PRAY

Body

Passage Focus

Jesus' encounter with the Pharisees and Sadducees leads to a warning for his disciples.

Point 1: Faith rests in God's revelation (16:1-3)

▪ **revelation** = truth God has graciously chosen to reveal to us...Jesus' miracles were revelation in that the signs performed revealed who Jesus is, and where he came from (the Father)

FCF: demanding more while failing to perceive the signs that have been given

Explanation

The Pharisees and Sadducees approach Jesus asking for a sign from heaven = different ends of the religious spectrum united against Jesus. He has returned from Gentile territory to Jewish territory (15:39).

Pharisees

- The most influential Jewish party despite the fact that they didn't hold power
- The authorized teacher/experts in the law, promoting an oral tradition of law observance, who supplanted the priests because of their popularity with the common people

- The orthodox interpreters of Scripture: they believed in life after death, providence, the spirit world, and a coming Messiah

Sadducees

- They were a major power in the Sanhedrin (= the supreme religious, political, and legal counsel in Jerusalem) and the high priesthood
- They did not have the support of the masses, but they did have the confidence of the wealthy
- They were generally hostile to the Pharisees with disagreement in matters of purity
- Doctrinally they were liberal: rejected the resurrection, denied the immortality of the soul, did not believe in rewards and punishment after death, were more deistic (= had problems with providence that interfered with human affairs), and denied the existence of the spirit world

Enemies unified by a common opponent. In other words, the Israel's religious establishment was united in their opposition to Jesus. They request a sign. At this point we need to stop and ask, what more could they want?

- healing a paralytic where scribes were present (9:1-7)
- raised from the dead the daughter of a synagogue ruler (9:18-26)
- cast demons out of a mute man, which the Pharisees knew about (9:32-34)
- restored the withered hand of a man to health in the presence of the Pharisees (12:9-14)
- the Pharisees heard of Jesus healing a blind and mute man by casting out demons (12:22-32)
- surely they were aware of more...
- Jesus had went throughout all Galilee (Northern Israel) healing and casting out demons to the point where his fame was spreading north of Israel into Syria. And crowds from southern Israel as well as the Decapolis (Gentile territory southeast of Galilee) were following Jesus (see 4:23-25).

Evidently they're not satisfied with healings or demons cast out or even the dead raised. They want something more extraordinary. Maybe something on the level of parting the Red Sea or splitting the ground in half to swallow up rebellious Israelites (Num 16:31-35). Note their motive. They wanted to test Jesus. Evidently they assumed Jesus incapable of producing a sign from heaven. When he failed to produce the sign, their conclusions would be confirmed. They would have grounds for rejection.

Jesus indicts them for blindness/ignorance:

"When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.'³ And in the morning, 'It will be stormy today, for the sky is red and threatening.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times." – 16:2-3

A red sky at evening indicated fair weather. A red sky at morning indicated a storm. The Pharisees and Sadducees could read the weather but couldn't read the spiritual signs. An authoritative teacher with irrefutable logic, penetrating interpretation, and illuminating application (Deut 18:15-19). A miracle worker fulfilling the Messianic expectation (Isa 29:18; 35:5-6; 53:4). A messenger with compassion for sinners and sufferers (Isa 61:1). This wasn't enough. They wanted more. They were blind.

Application

God, in his wisdom, has chosen to reveal to us what he has determined to be helpful. Are you satisfied? Or do you find yourself, like the Pharisees and Sadducees, looking for more? The problem is when we make demands on God and reverse the Creator – creature distinction. God subjects us to evaluation, not the other way around.

Let's consider what this might look like in the Christian church. We might not demand God do extraordinary signs in the sky or signs in the sea. But we might demand that God act in extraordinary ways for us. Maybe it's demanding spectacular healings or a detailed prophecy/ word of knowledge or a visible sign from God, like a talking animal. If God doesn't perform on demand, I'm done. Maybe it's something we desperately want. I want to be healed. If God doesn't heal me, I'm done. Maybe I'm at a crossroad and there's a major decision I'm wrestling with. I want a direct answer from God. Not a Scripture. Not advice from a fellow believer. I demand an audible voice from God. If he doesn't grant my demand, I'm done.

The common denominator is the "Christian" making demands on God. God has to act or else. We set ourselves up for frustration when we demand that God act in a way that he hasn't promised to. We usurp the place of God. Are you demanding signs not promised? Are you pursuing signs not promised?

Non-Christians

We might approach God from a position of authority, demanding that God act on our terms. But we can't relate to God in this way. There's a different stance that has to be taken with God...

Point 2: Faith receives God's revelation (16:4)

FCF: rejecting revelation

The Pharisees and Sadducees weren't interested seekers. In Matthew 12:14 it says that "the Pharisees went out and conspired against him [Jesus], how to destroy him." This was after seeing Jesus heal a man's hand. Indisputable proof leads to a plot to put Jesus to death. The minds of the religious establishment were already made up. They tested Jesus from a stance of rejection. They were looking to find fault.

Jesus indicts them for rebellion:

An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah." So he left them and departed. – 16:4

Jesus doesn't bow to the demands of rebels. He's willing to heal a centurion's servant and a Canaanite's daughter, but he won't do signs on demand for Israel's religious leaders. The only sign he'll give them is the sign of Jonah, he'll be resurrected on the third day (see Matt 12:38-42). Their rebellion was so great, even the resurrection wouldn't convince them (see Luke 16:31).

Jesus is done with the Pharisees and Sadducees, so he departs from their presence. Previously he told his disciples to leave the Pharisees and scribes alone and not to worry about offending them (15:12-14). The religious establishment have set themselves against their Messiah. They've been planted by Satan (15:13).

In doing so they were fulfilling Scripture:

Isaiah 53:3-4 He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. ⁴ Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted.

The Pharisees and Sadducees were unresponsive to God's revelation. They failed to perceive Israel's Messiah before them. Isn't healing the blind what the Messiah would do? Isn't healing a man's withered hand a good thing? Is setting someone free from demonic possession a good thing? Why did they continue to rebel? Because they hardened their hearts to what they saw and heard. They wouldn't receive Jesus, no matter the revelation.

Application

What's the difference between the Pharisees' demand and the Canaanite woman's persistence? Didn't they both harass Jesus to perform miracles? The difference is posture. There's a difference between I'm desperate, I believe you can help, I believe you're merciful and I won't bow down to you unless you prove yourself (when in fact he had already proved himself repeatedly). The religious establishment doubted. The woman trusted.

We need to ask ourselves, am I ignoring the signs God has provided? In 16:4, the sign Jesus will provide is the resurrection. The sign that he's victorious over the grave. The sign that guarantees the future resurrection of all who believe. The sign that guarantees the fall will be undone. The religious establishment knew Jesus promised he would rise after three days (Matt 27:62-64). The Roman guards had motive to maintain possession of the body because failure would result in death (Matt 27:65-66; 28:11-15). But they couldn't maintain Jesus' body because the Son of God had power over death (John 10:17-18).

There's other signs to be found. The sign of the new birth. God is changing human hearts today by putting his Spirit in them. The sign of fellowship (John 13:34-35). God is uniting people from diverse backgrounds, people who wouldn't naturally associate with one another, and making them one in the local church.

Am I ignoring the revelation God has preserved? The Bible. In the Bible, God has chosen to record his acts, explain those acts, and reveal himself. His power. His wisdom. And he's revealed how we're supposed to relate to him. Instead of demanding fantastic signs, we're better off embracing the revelation he's chosen to preserve for us.

Non-Christians

Maybe today you find yourself looking for a sign. Ponder for a moment. Are you blind to the signs God's given?

Isn't healing the blind a good thing? Isn't setting a woman's daughter free from demonic spirits a good thing? Isn't restoring a dead child to life a good thing? Isn't victory over death a good thing? Isn't the end of death, disease, suffering, sorrow, and sin a good thing? Isn't God putting an end to humans inflicting harm on other humans a good thing? Isn't the new birth a good thing? Isn't God rescuing people from destructive and foolish habits by changing their hearts a good thing?

Do you find yourself looking for a sign today? Consider the signs God has already given. Maybe you have a relative, a co-worker whose life God has radically altered in a good way? Have you seen a person be rescued from substance abuse or selfishness or foolishness or irresponsibility because they believed in Jesus? Maybe

the sign of the cross? The place where God's mercy and justice meet. The place where we can be pardoned, despite our rebellion, because Jesus took the punishment for our sins. Isn't a cleansed conscience and peace with our Creator a good thing? Isn't God's mercy a good thing? Isn't Jesus selflessness, suffering for the underserving, a good thing? Isn't the fact that God cares about evil a good thing?

Point 3: Faith remembers God's revelation (16:5-12)

FCF: failure to remember leads to worry

Explanation

The disciples had boarded their boat and reached their destination, but forgot to bring any bread. At this point Jesus teaches saying, *"Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees (16:6)."* They don't get what Jesus is saying because they're preoccupied with the bread they forgot. Jesus' warning goes over their heads. Jesus critiques their faith once again: *"why are you discussing among yourselves the fact that you have no bread (16:8)?"* Why don't you understand? Don't you remember how I fed the 5,000 and the 4,000 (16:9-10)? Jesus is disappointed: *"How is it that you fail to understand that I did not speak about bread?"*

What's going on here? What does the feeding of the 5,000 and 4,000 have to do with the dangers of the Pharisees' teaching?

- the disciples are preoccupied with the bread they forgot: where will we get bread? how will we eat?
- preoccupied with the forgotten bread, Jesus' leaven reference causes them worry about physical bread
- they have "little faith" because forgetting the bread should be a non-issue...after all, Jesus recently fed thousands from nothing...surely he can provide food
- their perception is off because their mind is in the wrong place: they should be focused on the dangers of the Pharisees' teaching, not their lack of physical bread

They failed to understand because they're consumed by their mistake. They should have remembered what Jesus had done and been free from worry. Their faith is little because worry is present.

Application

The point isn't, "Boy the disciples are really slow. I'm happy I'm not like them." The point is, Am I like the disciples? Do I worry when there's no need? Do I forget what God has done? Do I forget God's promises? Do I forget God's character? Like the disciples, we have a tendency to forget God's ability and compassion. Which leads to worry. And worry weakens our faith.

The disciples differed from the Canaanite woman in that she trusted what Jesus could do whereas they only saw their impossible circumstance. They forgot about the one with them who could provide the missing bread.

Conclusion

Christianity is fundamentally a response to revelation. God speaks. We respond. The Pharisees and Sadducees failed to respond. They couldn't perceive. They wouldn't perceive. No matter how strong the evidence. They rebelled. They said, "I need more proof." What a picture of skepticism! No matter the evidence, skeptics will keep saying I need more proof. I have another question.

The disciples struggled to perceive Jesus' teaching. Because worry clouded their perception. They should have remembered Jesus' ability.

God's revelation isn't merely factual. God's revelation is relational. Revelation calls for a response. Revelation draws out trust or rejection.

Rest in God's revelation.

Receive God's revelation.

Remember God's revelation.

Isn't mercy on the sick, the demon possessed, and parents grieving the death of a child a good thing? Isn't Jesus' authority over death a good thing? Isn't mercy a good thing? Isn't putting an end to sin and suffering a good thing?