

# *Matthew 16:1-12*

*Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 10/2/2011*

## **How can we escape the snare of deadly false teaching?**

### **Prayer**

Father, we are so thankful for this time we can come together as a body and corporately worship You, and praise You, and give You honor and glory. We are so thankful. We are so thankful for Christ, Your Son, whom You sent, and He came and died for our sins. We are so thankful for Your Word which reveals Christ. And Father, we are thankful that You used Your Word to cause us, through the gospel, to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. And Father, we are so thankful that You use Your Word to grow us in respect to salvation, in respect to Christ. Father, I just pray as we look in Your Word today, You would prepare our hearts, You would convict us, You would correct us, You would train us, that we would be adequate, equipped for every good work You have planned for us. Help us to be submissive and to receive Your Word rightly, Lord God, as You would have, to yield to You and obey Your Word. So Lord, we ask You to bless Your Word as it goes out now. In Jesus' precious Name. Amen.

### **Sermon**

Well, what would you say about someone who allowed children to be hurt? You would say, "That is not a very good person," wouldn't you? Someone who allowed children to be abused, you'd say, "That's an awful evil person," wouldn't you? And I think, if you were a parent, you would do anything and everything to protect your children from dangers of those who might hurt them. Now, what would you say about someone who did not hurt children, but did not intervene when they were being hurt, and could do something? You would say they are just as evil as those who were hurting them, wouldn't you, because they are not protecting those precious little lives?

Well, the reality is that there are a lot of God's children in the church starving these days. There are a lot of wicked men who come up Sunday after Sunday and talk about Jesus, but do not give the flock His Word. And there are a lot of people who stand by and say nothing about it except, "Well, I think maybe he loves the lost," or this or that. The reality is that if you love the church, if you love God's people, if you love Christ, you will be concerned for them. You will think of them as more important than yourself. If you love someone, you would want to have a desire to protect them from things. You see, the Lord God loves us, and we see in His Word many, many warnings concerning those things which could hurt His children. We see in Scripture quite a bit that there are enemies to the gospel, there are enemies to Christ. If you would turn with me for a moment to 2 Corinthians chapter 11, we see that these enemies are not obvious. They are not obvious. They disguise themselves. 2 Corinthians 11:12, the apostle Paul is very concerned about the Corinthian church, very concerned that they have been swayed away from Christ and His Word, the false teaching that they have been unequally yoked with, wicked men who

# Matthew 16:1-12

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claim to follow Christ, and he is very concerned, and he is beckoning them to see him rightly, and thus the Word he brought rightly. 2 Corinthians 11:12,

**<sup>12</sup> But what I am doing, I will continue to do, (Paul says) that I may cut off opportunity from those who desire an opportunity to be regarded just as we are in the matter about which they are boasting. (And then he explains) <sup>13</sup> For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. <sup>14</sup> And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. <sup>15</sup> Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their deeds. [2 Corinthians 11:12-15]**

Folks, I see a lack of discernment in the church these days. We see the obvious cults and the obvious problems. People can say, “Hey, that’s not right.” But when someone disguises themselves as a servant of Christ, people say, “Hey, that is okay, because they love Christ.” But the reality is we are in a dangerous time, and God’s children are being abused and not fed. And I ask you, where is the concern from the body of Christ concerning the body of Christ?

We’re going to see today that the Lord Jesus was concerned, that the Lord Jesus warned His disciples, and if they are not above warning, neither are we above warning, as He warned them about the false teaching of those wicked Pharisees and Sadducees. And I believe that we are going to see how we can—through this—escape the snare of false teaching. If you would turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew 16, we’re going through the book of Matthew, we’ve come upon a section within this book where things are beginning to transition.

We have seen that Jesus Christ was presented as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, “You shall name Him Jesus, for He shall save His people from their sins.” We have seen Him affirmed with the Word of God. We have seen Him hated and those who desire to kill Him. We have seen the way prepared for Him, that way of repentance, (as presented by John the Baptist). We have seen Jesus share the very same thing: repent and believe in the gospel. We saw the teaching of Christ, as He graciously came upon those who were sitting in darkness yet would claim to follow Him, those who would say “Lord, Lord!” but yet did not know Him. We saw His teaching pointed to the reality of the false teaching of the Pharisees, those things that they would say, but God would say different, that man’s problem is not an external religious problem. It is a heart problem, and the only way to be saved from that is to enter through the narrow gate, the Person of Christ, the One who would go die for our sins.

We saw later on the affirming miracles to the message of Christ, that everything He was teaching and preaching was affirmed by the miraculous, that He was and is the Messiah predicted in the Old Testament who would come and open blind eyes, physically and also spiritually. And after two years of ministering, we saw it was apparent that the multitudes were rejecting Christ. They didn’t get it. They had become hardened, and Jesus turned and started to speak to them in parables, so that seeing they would not see, and hearing they would not hear, because they had closed their hearts and closed their eyes.

# Matthew 16:1-12

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 10/2/2011

See, God allows you to be convicted, but if you reject that, He allows you to be hardened. And we saw Jesus' condemnation, not only on the multitudes, but also on the Pharisees, as He shared that they were blind guides leading the blind into a pit, that they would be uprooted, that they would be judged. We saw that the Pharisees wanted to kill Jesus. We saw they were continually trying to set Him up so that they could discredit Him, and as the Lord Jesus moved away from the multitudes, He began to minister to His disciples. We saw the feeding of the five thousand, really a lesson for the disciples, as we see in Scripture. We see Jesus coming to His disciples in the storm walking on the water. We see Jesus retract and withdraw to Gentile territory, where He ministers to a Gentile woman with great faith who desires to have her child delivered. And we saw very clearly after that last week, that He went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, where the Gentiles were, and He fed the four thousand.

And now we see the religious leaders coming to Him as He comes back. Now it is important to realize that in chapter 16 of the book of Matthew that we have a great transition. We have this warning that we will see in the beginning of chapter 16, to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. And then we will see next week—Lord-willing—that Jesus begins to focus on His personhood, that He is the Christ.

And He also begins to focus on His work, as He sets His face toward Jerusalem to go to the cross. It is a transition. He has ministered, He has shared, they have rejected Him, and now He is on the way to the cross. But in the midst of this, He is still training His disciples, and we benefit so greatly by seeing these truths. So again, will you turn with me in your Bibles to Matthew chapter 16, and we're going to look at—Lord-willing—verses 1 to 12. Let's read them together today:

*<sup>1</sup> And the Pharisees and Sadducees came up, and testing Him asked Him to show them a sign from heaven. <sup>2</sup> But He answered and said to them, "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' <sup>3</sup> "And in the morning, 'There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot discern the signs of the times? <sup>4</sup> "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah." And He left them, and went away. <sup>5</sup> And the disciples came to the other side and had forgotten to take bread. <sup>6</sup> And Jesus said to them, "Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." <sup>7</sup> And they began to discuss among themselves, saying, "It is because we took no bread." <sup>8</sup> But Jesus, aware of this, said, "You men of little faith, why do you discuss among yourselves that you have no bread? <sup>9</sup> "Do you not yet understand or remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets you took up? <sup>10</sup> "Or the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many large baskets you took up? <sup>11</sup> "How is it that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? But beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." <sup>12</sup> Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. [Matthew 16:1-12]*

# Matthew 16:1-12

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We are going to see that the Lord Jesus, now with His disciples, focuses on two things: His personhood and His work, which would be going to the cross. And false teaching is what comes against these two things, and He lays the foundation for that. So how can we escape that snare? We need to recognize that we can fall, that we can be tempted to listen to things that are not right. When we lean on our own understanding, and think, "Well, that guy is a nice guy. He's so nice." We can be tempted to be sucked into wickedness; we can be tossed to and fro by various winds of doctrine. We need to recognize, we who stand, we need to take heed lest we fall. We can easily fall in our pride, and we need to know that God wants to protect us from wicked men who would defame His Word, and, ultimately, Christ.

So how can we escape the snare of deadly false teaching? First of all, I think this is so crucial: we must accept God's view of false teachers. I believe this is where we fall so critically in the church. We are unwilling to take what God says about false teachers, and say that is what they are. We substitute our own emotions and attitudes and thinking about people rather than take God's Word for what it says. It is crucial to understand this. We must make discerning judgments. We must be able to look out and avoid false teachers and teaching. You know, so many people I have seen are swayed to compromise or sympathize with false teachers because they say some good stuff about Jesus. We need to be very careful. We need to see them rightly according to the Word of God.

So notice here, the unbelieving Pharisees come up and dispute with Christ to discredit Him. Verse 1, <sup>1</sup>*And the Pharisees and Sadducees came up, and testing Him asked Him to show them a sign... [Matthew 16:1].* Now if you will remember from chapter 15, Jesus was over in the Gentile area, east of the Sea of Galilee, the Decapolis area, and at the end of chapter 15, you can look at that. *And sending away the multitudes, (verse 39) He got into the boat, and came to the region of Magadan. [Matthew 15:39]*

And in a parallel passage in Mark chapter 8, that is parallel to our passage, we see in verse 10: *And immediately He entered the boat with His disciples, and came to the district of Dalmanutha. [Mark 8:10]* Now we don't know where Magadan and Dalmanutha are, but we do know it is on the opposite side of the Sea of Galilee. So He was back in Israel. And at this point, we see the Pharisees and Sadducees were coming up. They came up and were testing Him. Mark chapter 8 verse 11, you might want to turn there, just to keep your finger in there, it says they (speaking of the Pharisees) *"came out and began to argue with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, to test Him."* [Mark 8:11]

Now just a little review, who were the Pharisees and the Sadducees? Who were these people? In Israel, there were different Jewish religious sects; the two main sects were the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The Pharisees were the strictest sect, which actually speaks of "a separated one." That's what the word *Pharisee* means. In Scripture, we see that the Pharisees were self-righteous, legalistic, nationalistic isolationists who were actually on their way to hell, and leading others there. The Pharisees hypocritically separated themselves from people they called sinners, from the common Jew. They were extremely prideful. They were religious hypocrites. And even in the midst of this, Jesus shared His truth with them. But after they rejected it, we see His condemnation of them.

# Matthew 16:1-12

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 10/2/2011

We have seen a lot in the book of Matthew concerning the Pharisees, if you've been with us. We saw back in chapter 3, the Pharisees along with the Sadducees were coming out to be baptized by John. They were going to do the popular thing at that time. And if you remember what John said about them back in chapter 3, He said, *"You brood of vipers, (or you den of venomous snakes, you offspring of snakes) who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" [Matthew 3:7b]*

That was our introduction to the Pharisees and Sadducees. And then we saw their external legalism, where they would not dine with sinners. We saw Matthew, the tax gatherer who had been saved, had invited other sinners to hear the truth. They were redeemed sinners, but the Pharisees would not be with those sinners. We saw in the end of chapter 12 that they had committed the unpardonable sin, that they attributed the work of Christ by the Spirit of God to Satan. And the reality is when you are truly convicted in the heart by the Spirit of God concerning Christ and you reject that and attribute it to something else, it is unforgivable. He is the only Savior. We saw in chapter 15, just a little while ago, Jesus' response to their accusation of why His disciples did not wash their hands. And he basically shared the reality of the fact that they were hypocrites, that their hearts were far from God. They worshipped with their lips, but their hearts were far, that they took the Word of God, and they invalidated it with their tradition.

Jesus made it clear to His disciples that it is not on the outside what defiles us, but it is what comes from the heart. And in Matthew 23, we have all kinds of woes towards the Pharisees. I'm not going to read it, but you can read Matthew 23, you have looked at it before. Jesus says, "Woe to you," and He gives all sorts of things concerning their wickedness, how they love respectful greetings, how they love this and that, how they tithe out the little bits of their spices but yet they don't observe the weightier parts of the law of love and compassion and mercy, that they are hypocrites, that they are leading people to hell. Matthew 23 verse 15:

**<sup>15</sup> "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, because you travel about on sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves. <sup>25</sup> "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you clean the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence. <sup>26</sup> "You blind Pharisee... (and He goes on to say) *first clean the inside of the cup and of the dish, so that the outside of it may become clean also.* (And in verse 33 He says) <sup>33</sup> *"You serpents, you brood of vipers, ("You offspring of venomous snakes." That is not very friendly!) how shall you escape the sentence of hell? [Matthew 23:15, 25-26, 33]***

These Pharisees were on their way to hell. They had rejected Christ. Well what about the Sadducees? Well, we need to remember the view of the Pharisees is not my opinion. That is God's view of the Pharisees. And we need to accept God's view of these false teachers, that were very outwardly religious and righteous. They were actually claiming to follow the God of Scripture. What about the Sadducees? The Pharisees were legalistic and they were externalistic. The Sadducees were different. They were liberal. They were the opposite on the political spectrum. And it is very interesting. We have the

# Matthew 16:1-12

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 10/2/2011

Pharisees and Sadducees coming together to accuse Jesus. And you know, wickedness makes strange bedfellows, because they really were not friends.

We have the opposite. Sadducees were very liberal in their theology; they basically did not believe in anything but the basic law of Moses. In Paul's defense before the counsel, we see the Sadducees did not believe a lot of stuff. Let me read this for you. Turn with me to Acts 23. Paul was very wise, and he was using the wicked views of the Pharisees and Sadducees against them in Acts 23. He knew that they had different views. Acts 23:6, the apostle Paul says,

***<sup>6</sup> But perceiving that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, Paul began crying out in the Council, "Brethren, I am a Pharisee, a son of Pharisees; I am on trial for the hope and resurrection of the dead!" <sup>7</sup> And as he said this, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and Sadducees; (see, they don't believe the same thing) and the assembly was divided. <sup>8</sup> For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, nor an angel, nor a spirit; but the Pharisees acknowledge them all. [Acts 23:6-8]***

See, the Sadducees were the subtractors. They subtracted doctrine. They were the liberal side without Christ. The Pharisees were the legalistic, adding their stuff to it. And now you've got both of these religious sects coming to Jesus to argue with Him, to test Him. And I believe, in light of the context of Matthew, this is not a legitimate question by them. They were determined to destroy Him. We saw it back in chapter 12, they were plotting to destroy Jesus, to kill Him. This was not a genuine question, where they really wanted to see a sign, as we will see, but they were using that to obviously sway the multitudes.

So back to our text, chapter 16 verse 1: <sup>1</sup> *And the Pharisees and Sadducees came up, and testing Him asked Him to show them a sign from heaven. [Matthew 16:1]* Well, at this point, you've got to be kidding, right? I mean, Jesus has healed every kind of disease, He has cast out demons, He has raised the dead, He has given blind sight, He has given the deaf hearing and the dumb speech, and they say, "Show us a sign," and now they add in this word "from heaven." We see later on that that word "heaven" is really the same word translated "sky" that Jesus uses. We look at it that way, just "from up there," that's my view, the sky, that's the heavens, right? Show us a sign from there. Remember back in chapter 12, they said "Teacher," and that was mockingly, "We want to see a sign from you." But here, they are upping it here a little bit, "We want to see a sign from heaven; we want to see some super fantastic heavenly sign from You." They wanted to see some type of visible sign.

And this is the epitome of unbelief folks. We saw it back in chapter 12. These Pharisees were doing it, I believe in the presence of the multitudes back from the book of Mark, and they were basically saying, in essence, "You have not done enough to prove Yourself as the Messiah." We need some super fantastic heavenly sign, or we are not going to accept You. It is the epitome of unbelief, and I believe they were trying to discredit Him. They already said that His earthly ministry was by Satan, and I believe they probably thought that He could not do anything else. I believe that. They were trying to set Him up.

# Matthew 16:1-12

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 10/2/2011

But notice what we see, He says, <sup>1</sup> *And the Pharisees and Sadducees came up, and testing Him asked Him to show them a sign from heaven. [Matthew 16:1]*

Well if you look in Mark chapter 8 verse 11, we see the same thing, but we see more the motive behind it. Mark 8:11: <sup>11</sup> *And the Pharisees came out and began to argue with Him, seeking from Him a sign from heaven, to test Him" [Mark 8:11]*

To put Him to the test. To put the Lord God to the test, which is evil by the way. And they were probably playing on the sinfulness of the multitudes. Indeed, Jews seek a sign. And folks, those who have rejected Christ are never satisfied with the evidence. Jesus has performed all kinds of miraculous things, has affirmed His deity, has affirmed His Messiahship, has affirmed that He is the Christ, and they have hardened their hearts to Him. They were unwilling to repent of their sin, and that is the issue. And when you harden your heart and are unwilling to repent of your sin, you can have as much stuff shown to you as you want, but you will not be saved. You will not yield. Let me remind you that signs were to authenticate the Person and work of Christ, not to validate human perceptions, or curiosity, or one's desires.

There are some of you here today who maybe rejected Christ already, as evidenced by your words, and there is nothing that you would be able to see that would cause you to turn, because your heart is hard. Folks, we will see today that the Pharisees' heart was hard. The Pharisees' heart was hard. And let me make it clear, it is never because of signs and wonders that anyone repents. No one repents because of signs and wonders. Faith comes from hearing and hearing from the Word of Christ. The signs and wonders affirm the Person of Christ and our need for a Savior. Take a look at Hebrews chapter 2. Let's turn there for a second. Hebrews chapter 2, and we have a warning here to not drift away from the gospel. You have heard the gospel, you need to respond to it. Do not drift away like a boat. Hebrews chapter 2,

**<sup>1</sup>For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. <sup>2</sup> For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, (that's the first covenant, that's the law) and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, <sup>3</sup> how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, (and then look) <sup>4</sup> God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will. [Hebrews 2:1-4]**

Salvation was declared by Christ, and then those who had seen and heard. It was declared, and it was affirmed or testified to by the miraculous. You do not become saved by the miraculous. You become saved by the knowledge of the person of Jesus Christ, who saves you from your sins. Turn to Luke chapter 16 for a moment. Familiar story, we won't go through the whole portion, but it's about the rich man and Lazarus. Lazarus a poor beggar at the door of the rich man. The rich man passes him by every day, an evidence that his heart has not been changed, there is no love for him. The rich man lives gayly

# Matthew 16:1-12

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 10/2/2011

in splendor, and Lazarus suffers. They both die, and within that you can read the true story later. They both die, we see, and Lazarus is comforted and taken to Abraham's bosom—figurative for heaven—the presence of the Lord, and the rich man opens his eyes in torment. And he is in agony because of the flame. And he basically says, "send Lazarus, you need to go warn my brothers about this place. You need to warn them." Then look at verse 27. This is the rich man in hades, he says,

***27b 'Then I beg you, Father, that you send him to my father's house-- 28 for I have five brothers-- that he may warn them, lest they also come to this place of torment.' (warn them about this place.) 29 "But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' (that's the Word of God) 30 "But he said, 'No, Father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will (here is the issue) repent!' 31 "But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded if someone rises from the dead.'" [Luke 16:27b-31]***

If you do not listen to the Word of God concerning your sin and salvation, you can have someone come back from the dead, you are not going to listen. Your heart is hard. That is what he is saying. Signs and wonders do not turn our hearts to be saved; they affirm the saving message of Christ. Never get caught up in signs and wonders, brothers and sisters. God is done with signs and wonders until the tribulation. He used them to affirm His first coming and He will use them to affirm His second coming. Do not get caught up in the wickedness of men who would pull you in the direction apart from the truth of the Word. Okay, so what is Jesus' reaction to them? What is Jesus' reaction? Back to Matthew 16, "<sup>1</sup> And the Pharisees and Sadducees came up, and testing Him asked Him to show them a sign from heaven. (verse 2, what does Jesus do?) <sup>2</sup> But He answered and said to them, "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' <sup>3</sup> "And in the morning, 'There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot discern the signs of the times? <sup>4</sup> "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah." And He left them, and went away."

In the book of Mark, chapter 8 verse 12, we see Jesus responding to the Pharisees, it says, <sup>12</sup> *And sighing deeply in His spirit, He said, "Why does this generation seek for a sign? [Mark 8:12a]* Evidently there were people with the Pharisees. Sighing deeply, He grieved. They didn't get it. They didn't get it. They were evil and adulterous. And deeply grieved, sighing deeply in His spirit. We see His response. And back in Matthew 16, you see what He says to them, pretty simple illustration, and I believe He is illustrating that they are totally spiritually blind. You can see physically just fine, you can discern things in the physical sphere, but in the spiritual sphere you are as blind as a bat. He says, "When it is evening you say 'It will be fair weather, for the sky— (That is literally the word 'heaven,' actually, that was used earlier, it is just show us a sign from the sky or from heaven) —for the sky is red and threatening."

There is an old sailor's ditty, and I'm not a mariner or a sailor, but it goes like this, "Red sky at night, sailors delight, red sky in the morning, sailors warning." He is saying, "You guys can discern the sky, but you don't see and discern the signs of the times." And what were the times? God had come upon them in human flesh. You are not seeing this! You are blind to this! You cannot see it. You are totally blind to the obvious time you are in. God has come upon you, and you cannot see Him.

# Matthew 16:1-12

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 10/2/2011

And folks, man is spiritually blind because of sin. You see, we cannot by our own nature truly see and comprehend the truth of God, but as John says in John chapter 1, John says,

*"There was the true light which, coming into the world, enlightens every man." [John 1:9]*

God gives you the light of the truth in the person of Christ, no matter how dark you are inside. But if you love your sin and are unwilling to repent, you will stay in your blindness. Look at John chapter 3. John chapter 3, let's look at verse 17, John chapter 3, we all know verse 16, right?

***"<sup>16</sup> For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life." (Well what about verse 17?) <sup>17</sup> "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world should be saved through Him. (That is why He came.) <sup>18</sup> "He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. <sup>19</sup> "And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light; for their deeds were evil. (The Pharisees loved darkness rather than light, you see.) <sup>20</sup> "For everyone who does evil hates the light, and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed. <sup>21</sup> "But he who practices the truth comes to the light, that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God." [John 3:16-21]***

You see, we're all spiritually blind to our condition, but God enlightens us with the gospel, that we are dead in our trespasses and sins, that we are sinners in need of salvation, and salvation comes through the Person of Christ. And then if we reject that, we become blind again; we become hardened because we have rejected the truth. We see that in Matthew chapter 13. Let's turn there, Matthew 13. We saw it when we went through it. Jesus is speaking to the multitudes, the Pharisees, they had seen and they had rejected Christ, so God has given them over to their blindness. It is an awful thing. Matthew 13 verse 13:

***<sup>13</sup> "Therefore I speak to them in parables; (You say "Why do you speak in parables, they're not going to understand that, "therefore I speak to them in parables") because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. <sup>14</sup> "And in their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, 'You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; And you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; (and here is why God is going to shield the truth from them) <sup>15</sup> For the heart of this people has become dull, (or hard) And with their ears they scarcely hear, And they have closed their eyes... [Matthew 13:13-15a]***

# Matthew 16:1-12

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 10/2/2011

You see, when you reject the gospel, you close your eyes to it. You harden your heart to it, then God allows you to stay in that hardened state. And we see in 2 Corinthians that God even allows Satan to harden you. 2 Corinthians 4, I'll share this, verse 3, Paul says, "And if our gospel is veiled," and I think he is addressing the criticism of "nobody is getting saved in your ministry, Paul!" He says,

***<sup>3</sup> And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, <sup>4</sup> in whose case the God of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. [2 Corinthians 4:3-4]***

When you reject Christ, you condemn yourself, in a sense, to this eternal blindness. You put yourself in the position of hardness. It is a terrible place to be. We do not know when that happens, we do not know. God knows. But I warn you, do not reject the truth. Do not harden your heart to the truth. Do not harden your heart to the gospel, the reality that you are sinful, or you will find yourself like these Pharisees, trying to discredit Christ. So back to our passage. Simple illustration we see, that these Pharisees are willingly blind. Christ is in their midst, they have rejected Him, they can discern the sky, but they cannot see this tremendous thing happening in front of them, the sign of the times, that God in flesh has come among them. They are blind. And notice He gives their true nature, verse 4, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah."

This is a scathing rebuke by a loving Lord. An "evil and adulterous nation," they need to know where they stand before Him. An evil and adulterous generation seeks a sign, we saw that back in 12. Jesus says that they are two things: evil and adulterous. You see, God came to them, the light shone in darkness, they have rejected that, they are evil. When you reject Christ, no matter how nice you are, you—in God's sight—are evil, and we need to know that. We need to accept God's view of who we are, whether we are saved or not. And He says to them, "evil and adulterous generation." If you are still in your sin, you are evil. All of us have been evil, all of us have done evil things, all of us like sheep have gone astray, but God has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Christ. You see, if you believe in Christ, He will forgive your sins. He will forgive your sins. You will be declared righteous. You will not be called evil; you will be called a saint, a holy one, because of Christ.

These people are evil, and He also says adulterous. Do I need to explain what the word adultery means? We understand it in the context of a relationship, when there was a covenant between a man and a woman, and there is a breaking of that covenant with another relationship, that is adultery. And these Jews had a covenant with the Lord at Sinai, the true living God. They had made a covenant with Him. They were to be His alone, yet they rejected their Messiah, who was in their midst, for their own religion of their own making. They were committing spiritual adultery. They were still saying, "The Lord." They were saying all the right stuff, but they were rejecting the Lord in their midst. Folks, we see that happening every Sunday in churches: people saying "Lord, Lord," saying "Jesus," all this stuff, but rejecting that Jesus in their midst by evidence of their rejection of His Word. He says, "You are an adulterous generation, you are committing spiritual adultery." And folks, believers can commit adultery,

# Matthew 16:1-12

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 10/2/2011

spiritual adultery. We can yoke ourselves with worldly religious things. We can yoke ourselves with things which are not in the Word of God, we can yoke ourselves with pastors who do not obey the Word of God, but use their own understanding to try to win people to Christ. We can yoke ourselves with wickedness. James chapter 4, James addresses the adultery of those there, He says,

**<sup>4</sup> You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.** (No matter if you're trying to win the world, it does not matter; God's Word is what matters.) **<sup>5</sup> Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: "He jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us"? [James 4:4-5]**

God is a jealous God. If you are truly saved, you are His, not someone else's. And the solution in James is to repent. The solution in James is to humble yourself before the mighty God, to mourn over your sin, to repent. I would say by and large, our current evangelical church is a very adulterous church. It has substituted what God has declared and demanded of pastors, and used one's own understanding to try and do the work of ministry. It is spiritual adultery. It is the rejection of Christ, because it is the rejection of His Word. We have a lot of spiritual adultery going on. And how does Jesus respond to them? "An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign; and a sign will not be given it, except the sign of Jonah."

Does Jesus capitulate to their request? No. And on a side note brothers and sisters, should we capitulate to the wicked requests of those who are genuinely not seeking Christ? No. When people are asking all these rabbit trail questions that do not have to do with the fact of sin and the savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, should we capitulate to those? We have seen an example in the Lord here, a sign will not be given, except the sign of Jonah. We are not going to get into it like we did back in chapter 12, but we saw what the sign of Jonah was. We saw it back in chapter 12. Let's go back and I'll read it for a moment. Chapter 12 verse 38. Same evidence of unbelief, 12:38,

**<sup>38</sup>Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered Him, saying, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You." (And that was really mockingly, in light of their hatred for Christ. they wanted to kill Him. they're mocking Him with that word teacher, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You.") <sup>39</sup> But He answered and said to them, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign; and yet no sign shall be given to it but the sign of Jonah the prophet; <sup>40</sup> for just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. [Matthew 12:38-40]**

You see, there are two different types of prophecies in the Old Testament: there are prophecies that are predictive, and there are prophecies that are typified. And what I mean by that, sometimes God predicts what will happen, sometimes God shares things that typify or are a type of what will happen. Jonah was a type of what would happen to Christ. Jonah being in the whale for three days and three nights typifies Christ being in the ground for three days and three nights, which speaks of His death and

# Matthew 16:1-12

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 10/2/2011

burial and resurrection. That is the only sign you are going to get. That's it. That's it. They had rejected Christ, no more affirming miracles, no more affirming signs, for that in that sense, the resurrection of Christ and His death would be the last one that they would see.

And folks, as we look back, that is the only sign that God gives us now. It is the sign of Jonah, that Jesus Christ died for your sins, He was buried and He rose from the dead. That is the one you need. That is the one that points you to the right thing: Christ. So then, Jesus is deeply grieved, but He does not capitulate. How can we avoid the trap of false teachers? We need to see them the way God sees them. I am tempted, you are tempted, we hear people, you look at them, you talk to them, and you go, "That's not that bad." We are tempted to compromise because they are people. We need to go back to the Word, and see what does God say about that person who is acting behaving and speaking in that way. What does God say? And we need to hold to that, otherwise we will not be aware of them. And brothers and sisters, we need to be more discerning. We need to be discerning. We need to wake up. There are bad guys out there and bad girls out there, who name the name of Christ. We saw it in 2 Corinthians 11, "They disguise themselves as workers of righteousness."

Philippians 3, and let's turn there, I will share a few passages. Philippians 3. We have multiple warnings in Scripture for the body of Christ, because God loves us. Remember what I said? If you had someone who would injure your child, you would warn them, you would be careful, you would watch out for them, you would be concerned because you love them, right? God loves us. He is concerned. Philippians 3 verse 1,

**<sup>1</sup>Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things again is no trouble to me, and it is a safeguard for you.** (It is no trouble to remind you again and again and again!) **<sup>2</sup> Beware of the dogs, beware of the evil workers, beware of the false circumcision; [Philippians 3:1-2]**

He is talking about those false teachers - beware! It no problem for me to remind you again. Acts chapter 20, we see the apostle Paul in chapter 20,

**<sup>29</sup> "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock;** (he is telling these elders, "they are going to come in, they are savage wolves) **<sup>30</sup> and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. <sup>31</sup> "Therefore be on the alert, remembering that night and day for a period of three years I did not cease to admonish each one with tears. [Acts 20:29-31]**

Serious stuff. Paul was broken over the threat to the body of Christ. He loved Christ. He loved His people. You see, we need to see things God's way, not our way. We can be so deceived into compromising because we don't want to have conflict, or we don't want to have whatever. We need to see it the way God sees it. 2 Timothy 3:13, I will read it for you:

# Matthew 16:1-12

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 10/2/2011

**<sup>3</sup> But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. [2 Timothy 3:13]**

Impostors! They say they love Christ. They are impostors, evil and adulterous. 2 Peter chapter 2, let's turn there. 2 Peter 2. And if you are saying "Wow" (and you may be a first timer here), you are saying, "This guy sure talks a lot about this." I'm just sharing God's Word. God is concerned. God is concerned. 2 Peter 2 verse 1,

**<sup>1</sup>But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, (It is secretly done. It is not in the open. Brothers and sisters, we need to wake up and be discerning. God is warning us about the nature of the bad guys. He is warning us. He says) *even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.* <sup>2</sup> *And many will follow (what?) their sensuality, (that is fleshiness) and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned;* <sup>3</sup> *and in their greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. [2 Peter 2:1-3]***

Folks, if someone comes and does not do the duty that God has called them to do, to preach and teach the Word to you, they are disobeying the Lord. They do not love. If you love Him, you will keep His Word. We have got to see it through God's eyes, not our own emotions, brothers and sisters. If we do not, we are in deep trouble. Lastly, Jude. Let's turn to Jude, it's right before Revelation. You are probably familiar with this. verse 3, Jude writes,

**<sup>3</sup> Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith (That is the truth. It is the body of truth we believe about Christ. Contend earnestly for the faith, He say) *which was once for all delivered to the saints.* (Why do you contend earnestly?) <sup>4</sup> *For certain persons have crept in (like a slimy bug creeping in) unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness [Jude 3-4]***

These are like the Sadducees, folks. We don't have many Pharisees in the evangelical church these days. We've got a lot of Sadducees, people who are saying less than what God says, people who are more liberal in that sense, people who are more in the line of turning God's grace into licentiousness, "God is a gracious God, it's okay, He wants to forgive everybody, so let's just let them come in, whoever they are, it doesn't matter." Folks, we need to see things the way God sees them.

And lastly, Matthew chapter 7. This is the Lord Jesus' warning. Matthew 7:15. And none of us are above this. Do not think you are so smart and wise that you don't have to worry about this or be concerned. We are being warned because God believes we need to be warned.

# Matthew 16:1-12

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 10/2/2011

<sup>15</sup> **"Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, (remember we saw, it is shepherds garb. They come like shepherds to you, He says,) but inwardly are ravenous wolves.** (You cannot see the inside, but God is telling us what the inside is like. He says) <sup>16</sup> **"You will know them by their fruits.** (Here is how you are going to spot them.) **Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor figs from thistles, are they?** <sup>17</sup> **"Even so, every good tree bears good fruit; but the bad tree bears bad fruit.** <sup>18</sup> **"A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit.** <sup>19</sup> **"Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.** <sup>20</sup> **"So then, you will know them by their fruits.** (What are the fruits in the evangelical church these days? A bunch of people that claim to know Christ that are not saved. You will know them by their fruits. Notice what He says.) <sup>21</sup> **"Not everyone (here is the fruit) who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven.** <sup>22</sup> **"Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?'** <sup>23</sup> **"And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.' [Matthew 7:15-23]**

You will know them by their fruits. Watch out. Beware. Beware. Beware. The Lord loves us. So then folks, how can we escape the trap of false teachers? We have to see them the way God sees them. If we do not see them that way, we will not be as concerned and cautious. We have got to see them the way God sees them, evil and adulterous wicked men on their way to destruction.

Well, notice next we see some commands. We have some commands to heed. Look at the end of verse 4, back in Matthew 16, *"And He left them and went away.* (So He left the Pharisees, and I believe some multitudes there too, because Jesus talked about the generation in Mark) *He left them and went away.* (Verse 5 chapter 16) <sup>5</sup> *And the disciples came to the other side and had forgotten to take bread.*

I find this is quite amazing, by the way. What just happened back in a few verses? Jesus fed the four thousand. They had twelve huge left over baskets, and they get in the boat and they forget bread. They had all kinds of bread right? So they are distracted here by the way. They are definitely distracted. They forgot to bring bread, and notice what Jesus says, and He said, "Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." You see, what's on the Lord's mind is danger, "What I just showed you, you watch out for." He is teaching them. "Evil men, they are adulterous, now you disciples watch out and beware." The term "watch out" means to look. The term "beware" *prosecho*, means "take heed to," in a sense of being warned. Be warned. Watch out for the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. He is talking about those guys He just talked to a minute ago. That is what is on our Lord's mind: protecting His precious sheep.

And notice here, He says *"the leaven of the Pharisees."* Now leaven is not yeast. Leaven was a little piece of bread that had yeast in it. You see, it was a piece of bread that had yeast that they would add to bread to make it come out. And yeast is used in Scripture to speak of sin, because it permeates everything. But it was also used back in chapter 13 to speak of the kingdom, which will eventually, after

# Matthew 16:1-12

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 10/2/2011

God judges, permeate everything. He is saying “Beware of the leaven” as we see down farther, it is their teaching; it permeates everything. It infects you. Do not think you can listen to false teachers and not be infected. Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Beware of the hypocrites on their way to hell. Beware, as we see down in verse 12, look at it,<sup>12</sup> *Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. [Matthew 16:12]*

Beware of what they teach. It is their doctrine. It is what comes out of their mouth. Beware. Beware. Watch out. Jesus needed to warn His disciples, and I think sometimes we can be so prideful, thinking we do not need to be warned. Who are we to say that? God is warning us. He is warning us. He is warning, and they are a threat to the Person and work of Christ. They are a threat to the kingdom.

But notice back in our passage, verse 7, and He says,<sup>7</sup> *And they began to discuss among themselves, saying, "It is because we took no bread."* [Matthew 16:7] They are thinking, “Oh boy, we had all that bread back there, and we did not bring any bread!” And He is saying, “Beware the leaven; don’t buy bread from those Pharisees.” They did not understand it!

But notice Jesus uses this as an example, an opportunity to reprove them yet teach them. What a gracious God. Verse 5 again,

***<sup>5</sup> And the disciples came to the other side and had forgotten to take bread. <sup>6</sup> And Jesus said to them, "Watch out and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees." <sup>7</sup> And they began to discuss among themselves, saying, "It is because we took no bread." (and then verse 8) <sup>8</sup> But Jesus, aware of this, said, "You men of little faith, why do you discuss among yourselves that you have no bread?" (Why are you talking about bread?) <sup>9</sup> "Do you not yet understand or remember the five loaves of the five thousand, and how many baskets you took up? <sup>10</sup> "Or the seven loaves of the four thousand, and how many large baskets you took up? [Matthew 16:5-10]***

“Don’t you trust that I am going to provide your lunch for you? These people stayed with Me three days and I fed them. I had compassion because they were hungry, and now you are saying, ‘we don’t have any bread’? You men of little faith.” Being small in faith is not a compliment. It is a rebuke. But He reminds them of the truth of what He has done. That is where we grow in our faith.

A side note, God promises to take care of food and shelter—seek first His kingdom and His righteousness—He will take care of that. Now notice here, He says in verse 11, *"How is it that you do not understand that I did not speak to you concerning bread? But beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees."* [Matthew 16:11] Verse 9, the word “understand,” and verse 11, the word “understand,” *noeo*, means to mainly perceive. “How is it you do not mentally perceive this? You are missing it. How is it you do not understand? I am not speaking about physical bread. I am speaking of the leaven of the Pharisees.”

# Matthew 16:1-12

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 10/2/2011

Notice the disciples get it. Verse 12, “Then they understood that He did not say to beware of the leaven of bread, but of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” It is a different word translated “understood,” *sunemi*. It speaks of the bringing together, the “I got it” moment. They understand now. God provides our food, He is not talking about that; that is not a big deal to Him, the food. The big deal is the false teachers. Beware of them. Beware of them. Beware of their teaching. Their teaching is in direct conflict with the truth concerning Christ. Oh, it is a lot about the Lord, the God of Israel. Yes, all kinds the Pharisees were masters at the law. They were masters in the Old Testament, but they were hypocrites. And the Sadducees, they were those who lessened what God said, which we see today. They were the licentious ones, who turned the grace of God into licentiousness. Jesus says, “Beware of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

How can we escape the grip of false teaching? How can we escape it? First of all, we need to see it as bad as God says it is. Folks, even I am tempted. I look at someone, and someone says, “It’s not that bad.” I will look, I will study the sermon, I’ll go, “It’s kind of nice,” a little. Wait a second, no. Here is what God’s Word says in light of what they are saying. This is what they are—not what I feel—this is what they are. Watch out beware. Get away from it. We need to do that. We need to be discerning, folks, we need to be discerning. How can we escape it, these ones who disguise themselves and creep in unnoticed? We have got to see them the way God sees them. Folks, we need to know the Word. We need to allow the Word to address our hearts, and then we need to heed the warnings. There are lots of warnings in Scripture. Our Lord loves us. He warns us. Are you willing to heed His warnings? Are you willing to beware of those disobedient and detestable men, as we see in Titus chapter 1, worthless for any good deed, holding to a form of godliness yet they deny it? You will know them by their fruits. Beware.

Do you see the warnings as a safeguard for you? Folks, these Pharisees were blind, and some of you are blind. We all are blind. We cannot see the truth of the gospel until God illumines our hearts. And He made it clear, very clear, that we are sinners. But Jesus Christ came—as we will see in Matthew—He came to seek and save that which was lost. He came to die for our sins. And if you repent of your sin, you turn to God, and you call out to Christ, He will save you. He will open your eyes. You will have sight. You will leap for joy. You will be saved and delivered. We need to beware of those with hardened, blinded hearts: false teachers. Some of us today may be convicted, that we are too loosey goosey with different ministries, that we are not beware of those who are wicked. We need to be confronted with the Word of God and respond rightly, for our protection and those we love.

I want to finish with 2 Peter chapter 3. Let’s turn there, 2 Peter chapter 3. As you are turning there, how can we escape? We need to see these wicked men the way God sees them, and we need to heed the warning, look out, watch out for them. I’m going to go back to verse 14, and we will finish here. 2 Peter chapter 3,

# Matthew 16:1-12

Preached by Greg Lundstedt at Vancouver Bible Fellowship Church on 10/2/2011

<sup>14</sup> **Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things,** (That is a new heaven and new earth; we are looking for one in which righteousness dwells, we are looking for that coming of Christ, when He makes it all right.) <sup>14</sup> **Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless,** <sup>15</sup> **and regard the patience of our Lord to be salvation;** (He has not come yet because He is saving people.) **just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you,** <sup>16</sup> **as also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures, to their own destruction.** (That's the bad guys.) <sup>17</sup> **You therefore,** (And this is for us, brothers and sisters.) **beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard lest, being carried away by the error of unprincipled men, you fall from your own steadfastness,** (Be on guard. Don't fall, brother and sister.) <sup>18</sup> **but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.** (We grow through His Word being proclaimed and receiving it.) **To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen. [2 Peter 3:14-18]**

## Prayer

Father, thank You for Your Word. Thank you for Your Son Jesus who loved us so much He would die for us, who loves us so much He would warn us, loved His disciples so much to warn them and to train them. Father, I pray that we would trust You, we would obey You that we would not have small faith, and thus be vulnerable to not hearing Your Word, we would be about the things we should not be thinking about rather than what You said. Father, help us to trust You. I pray for anyone here who does not know You, who is blind, Lord God, that You would open their eyes that they would see the glory of the gospel, what Christ does for their sins. And I pray for those of us who have been saved, may we truly be on guard so that we would not be carried away by the error of unprincipled men, and that we would grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. We thank You for Your Word, we thank You for Your Son now, in His name we pray. Amen.

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