

# Faith and Questions

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[0:00] Father, we're very grateful that we are able to be in your presence this morning to receive from you. Father, you know which ones of us need, in a sense, Jesus to give us that look to stop us from what we're doing.

And you know, Father, which ones of us really need Jesus to pick us up. And you know which ones, Father, need Jesus to put an arm of encouragement and affection around them.

And so, Father, we come here in different states together to receive grace from you this morning. And we ask that the Holy Spirit would make Jesus real to us, that your word would have a powerful place in our lives, and that we might respond in a way which is truly worthy to the great grace that you offer us.

And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior. Amen. Please be seated. So, when I was growing up, Sunday was the worst day of the week.

I hated Sunday. I grew up in a very religious home. And obviously, there were very good things about my background. And it's a very easy thing in Canadian and North American culture just to dump on your parents.

[1:18] And I don't say this so that my kids can't dump on me. There's things I did that I have done that, of course, are not Christ-honoring or perfect. But I grew up in a Jewish neighborhood in an area of Montreal.

So, we were like the only Gentile. I was the only Gentile kid, the only non-Jewish kid on the street and in the whole neighborhood. And so, I grew up in a type of home where on Sundays, you went to Sunday school, then you went to church, and then at night, you went to the evening service.

And that's the world I grew up in. And I grew up in a home where you weren't allowed to play road hockey on days like today. You weren't allowed to ride your bike. You weren't allowed to play games.

You just had to be quiet. And I hated it. I really did. And it was especially hard, of course, because all of my Jewish friends were out there.

You know, on a day like today, they would have been playing road hockey or, you know, throwing a football around or just having fun. And I was stuck going to these things. And when I wasn't there, just stuck having to be quiet all day.

[2:26] And my memory is getting, I was probably not as quiet a kid as I should have been, and getting dirty looks from my parents. And I hated Sundays. I really did. It was, in fact, that type of an upbringing was, in many ways, one of the primary barriers to me becoming a Christian.

And I mention this for two reasons. One is that part of what, I don't know about you where you are in terms of things, or those of you who are watching online, but for many people in our culture, that's one of the reasons they don't want to become a Christian.

Because it's just religion, and it's just oppressive rules. And, you know, Christians have their own, you know, problems and stuff like that. And, you know, if you go towards Islam, well, I don't know, if you go towards Islam, then if you're really into Islam, you know, if you're men, you wear pants that are a bit short, because, you know, Muhammad wore pants that were short, and you have to grow a certain type of facial hair and wear, you know, funny clothes, and women maybe have to get themselves all covered up, and then maybe you're not allowed to go to school or go to dance or, you know, whatever, dance or have art.

And it's the same thing if you're really into Buddhism, you have to wear robes. And, you know, if you're really into Judaism, you know, then you have to wear a kippah. And then there's all these rules about what you can do and not do, and rules, rules, rules, rules.

And it's just crushing. And who on earth wants that? The text that we're going to look at today is a very, very powerful text of freedom and a rebuke to those who want to turn Christianity into a religion of a whole pile of rules.

[ 4 : 01 ] It's a very, very powerful text. It gets there at a bit of a circuitous or convoluted route, and it would be very helpful for you and for me if you open your Bibles for yourself. And let's look and see what goes on in the text and how it speaks to those people who want to pile rule upon rule upon rule as a sign of the spiritual life or the religious life.

And here's how the story goes. On sort of just a bit of a context, it's Mark 8, verses 1 to 23 we're looking at today. And Mark is, if you're maybe watching this for the first time or you haven't watched it in a while, Mark is an ancient eyewitness-based history, biography of Jesus.

It was written by a man who would have been an eyewitness for some of the events. He based everything he writes on eyewitness testimony, and the gospel or the biography is written when many eyewitnesses were around to correct it.

So we're reading, in a sense, an eyewitness document of the things that went on in Jesus' life. And what's just happened before this in the story, partially because I didn't get much time to preach on the last little bit.

I focused, those of you who were here last week, on the encounter between Jesus and the pagan woman. But what we're seeing is that Jesus and his disciples, Jesus has led us, the disciples, into a 120-kilometer walking journey through the areas near the majority Jewish areas, but they're all pagan-majority areas.

[ 5 : 36 ] And this is towards the end now of his 120-kilometer walking, mainly walking, but not exclusively, tour of these overwhelmingly pagan areas.

And here's how the story continues. Verse 1. In those days, when again a great crowd had gathered, they had nothing to eat. He called his disciples to him and said to them, I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat.

And if I send them away, hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way, and some of them have come from far away. Now, just sort of pause here for a second. There's sort of two things which are interesting to help you understand the story.

The first is the word compassion. And if you go back and you read the four ancient biographies that we have of Jesus, you will see that time and time again, the character trait that is most often connected to him is compassion.

And in this text as well, it's not just a character trait, but it's something which is a very deeply held emotional trait as well. In the original language, it's saying that there's something, his compassion when he sees their need is gut-wrenching.

[ 6 : 53 ] It is gut-wrenching compassion that he has for the crowd. The other thing which is going on in this story is, if you've read the little bit just before that, you'll see that they're in the region of the Decapolis.

And if you go back several chapters to chapter 5, there's a story which is sort of infamous in Christian circles of Jesus healing the man who had a legion of demons inside of him.

And it's often referred to as the Gadarene demoniac. And that story of when Jesus, as a man who's possessed by many demons, he casts the demons out into the pigs.

And the man asks to go with Jesus, and Jesus says to him, no, you can't come with me. I need you to go to your home and tell everybody that you meet what I've done for you.

But the people from the community have come to Jesus, and they want Jesus to leave because they're terrified of what they've just seen. And so the interesting thing is we don't know, because Mark doesn't do time markers, really.

[ 7 : 57 ] He just goes from incident to incident. So we don't know if this is six months later, or a year later, or a year and a half later, or whatever. But Jesus is now in the same region where the healing of the deliverance of the Gadarene demoniac happened.

So it's very, very striking. They so don't want Jesus there, they ask him to leave. The Gadarene demoniac has given this test, this task. This pagan has given this task of telling people what Jesus has done.

And now, whether it's six months or a year or whatever later, as we'll see in a moment, over 4,000 people want to hear about Jesus. That's the transformation which has happened.

It doesn't directly link it. It just links it indirectly through the name tags. So God bless that man's witness to Jesus, that nameless man.

And so now we have this very, very large crowd, and they've wanted to be with Jesus for three days. They've run out of their food, and they're hungry. So this next bit, believe it or not, this next little bit is something that has caused lots of debate amongst scholars.

[ 9 : 05 ] What is it that's caused this debate amongst scholars? Let's look and see. Verse 4. So Jesus says, you know, what are we going to do with this crowd? Send them home. And his disciples answered him, how can one feed these people with bread here in this desolate place?

Now here's the thing which has puzzled all these commentators. They write lots of stuff about it. Is, like, duh, don't they remember the feeding of the 5,000?

Like, why don't they just say, you know, like, what's going on here with the text? Well, there's several things which are going on in the text, which I think are very significant.

The first thing is, one of the arguments, very powerful arguments, for the historical credibility of this text is the fact that it does not show the leadership of the Christian movement in a good light.

Not normally the way, if you're going to doctor things, you know, like, okay, I'm going to be bipartisan. The next election, the conservatives are going to make sure that they try to make, that underestimate anything that they did bad in the past will be sort of covered up, and they'll emphasize the things they got right.

[ 10 : 15 ] The liberals will do the exact same thing. The NDP will do the exact same thing. That's just human nature, so that when you're retelling the past, you try to kick under the carpet anything which was, you know, like, evil or stupid, and you try to emphasize those times when you're bright.

And so one of the things which is very powerful about the Gospels is it doesn't do that for Peter or the apostles or the disciples. It does not paint them in good light. But the other thing is actually sort of a more important point in it, because it may be obvious to many of us.

We go, well, why don't they remember the 5,000? But here's the thing. It's an important thing about the Christian life, is that Jesus is restoring us to full humanity.

When you put your faith and trust in Jesus, it isn't that now all of a sudden he wants you to pretend that you're an angel or that you don't have any human needs or you don't have emotions. He's restoring you to what it means to be human.

And from a Christian point of view, the profound text about that is Genesis 1 and 2. And so it's not the case in the Christian life that, like at the 8 o'clock service, I don't know how many people had breakfast before they came.

[ 11 : 24 ] Probably most of you have had breakfast before you came. But it wasn't the case that a devout Christian wakes up on a Sunday morning and says, Lord, today I want to place my order and I'd like you to provide, you know, toast and coffee and yogurt for breakfast.

I'd like you to provide a coffee and a cookie in the mid-morning. And then for lunch I'd like this. And in the afternoon I'd like this. And then for supper I'd like this. And then you just sit and pray until God magically provides it.

That's not the Christian life. See, he's restoring you to humanity, full humanity. And that means there's a dignity to work.

There's a dignity to prayer. There's a dance that we are to master and learn between prayer and work. It means that the Lord is wanting us to figure out the resources that we have and to use those in a way which are wise for creativity, for productivity, to meet your needs.

But he's also going to constantly put before you things that need to be done that he's calling you to do that are beyond your resources because he wants us to know the one who controls all the resources and from whom all our resources come.

[ 12 : 43 ] And there's to be this dance between, well, I have short sleeves, rolling up your sleeves and getting the job done. And at the same time the Lord's going to call, like, here's a bit of an aside.

I don't know if he's here today. I might be bringing before you in a short while whether we should plant a church in Seoul, South Korea. Do we have the resources for that?

No. No. Not even a fraction. I'm not making this up. I'm in a conversation with somebody as to whether we should, I've done a little bit of research on whether we should, God should use us to help plant a church in Seoul, South Korea.

We don't have the resources for that. Not even close. If you come here on the last Sunday of April, probably there'll be a bit of a presentation because we're going to have a bit of a role in seeing

whether God is calling a church like ours to be planted in Charlottetown.

Not as far away as Seoul, South Korea, but it's 1,350 kilometers away. We don't have the resources to do that. But we know one who has the resources to do it.

[14:01] So the disciples here aren't rebuked for saying to Jesus, well, Jesus, I know the answer to this question.

Do your stuff. Do a minute. No, they're not rebuked for it. Right? They're not rebuked. So what happens?

It's similar and different to those of you who are familiar with the story of the feeding of the 5,000. Look what happens in verse 5. He asked them, how many loaves do you have? They said seven. And he directed them to sit down on the ground.

And he took the seven, well, actually, just pause there for a second. He directed them to sit, the crowd to sit down on the ground. Now, if you really want me to hear my explanation of the miracle, most of the, if you go back to, I think it's chapter 5.

No, it's chapter 6. Chapter 5 is the healing of the deliverance of the gathering demoniac. Chapter 6 is the feeding of the 5,000, has the feeding of the 5,000, where I sort of really go in depth to the miracle and what it signifies.

[15:07] But the main thing we want to see here is that the whole story is setting up the miracle. Including this important aspect of sitting down, because if they're all sitting down, they can see.

If it was just a big crowd of 4,000 people, most people might not know whether the disciples had brought in 10 wagon loads of fish and bread. But when they're all sitting down, they can see there's nothing.

All there is is Jesus' prayer and is passing out this stuff. And so by the end of this miracle, there is more matter in the universe than there was before. And it's all set up in the story.

Verse 6 again. And he directed the crowd to sit down on the ground. And he took the seven loaves, and having given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people.

And they set them before the crowd. And they had a few small fish. Just pause. It's a different word than in the feeding of the 5,000 for fish. So the other one would have been like, I don't know, fish this big or this big, however, you know, like that.

[16:09] These are like sardines. Okay? Little tiny fish. Sardines. And having blessed them, he said that these also should be set before them. And they ate and were satisfied.

And they took up the broken pieces left over, seven baskets full. And there were about 4,000 people. So from seven loaves and a handful of sardines, they fed 4,000 people and had seven baskets of food left over.

In verse 9, there were about 4,000 people. And he sent them away. And immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha. Now, I don't know how many of you have ever had conversations with Baha'is or with our Muslim friends, our Baha'i friends or our Muslim friends.

But in both cases, our Jehovah Witnesses friends, they will try to make a talk about how Jesus never claims to be God. And especially if you're talking to some of your Muslim friends, they have a deep suspicion about Paul and John.

But they like the Gospel of Mark because the Gospel of Mark is the earliest of the Gospels. They will often say it's the least corrupted of the Gospels. And they'll say that in the Gospel of Mark that Jesus never claims to be God.

[17:28] And that's not true, as we've looked at in different texts already and we'll see later on. And there are times that Jesus, very specifically in the Gospel of Mark, does claim to be God. But what is also true...

So first of all, it's not true that he never claims to be God in the Gospel of Mark. And this is more important than the claim. He acts like God.

And he does things that only the triune God can do. And that's what we see here. We see here Jesus acting as only the triune God can act.

He does not act like the gods of the pagans and the gods and the goddesses of the pagans. He does not act like Allah. And he does not act like the God of Krishna or Buddha.

He acts in a way that only the triune God acts. Because he is revealed in this miracle as doing something that only the creator and sustainer of the universe could do.

[ 18 : 34 ] He does something that only the creator and the sustainer of the universe can do. And so what we see here is that Jesus is revealed as the creator and sustainer of his fallen creation present in the flesh.

And doing what only the creator and the sustainer of all things can do. And this is very, very, very important. Because at the same time that we see him doing this, he's revealed.

Remember I said that what begins this is gut-wrenching compassion. He's revealing the God that truly exists. And the God that truly exists is a God of gut-wrenching compassion.

And it's also important because this is all one story. And if you follow from this to the next to the next to the next, eventually you come to the point where Jesus dies upon the cross.

And when we get to that, we'll talk about the different things like the institution of the Lord's Supper and his temptation and his prayer in the garden. And his words from the cross and what all of those things mean.

[ 19 : 37 ] But what's being set up here is that who's dying on the cross, who's dying on the cross is the creator and sustainer of all things come in the flesh. And that is tremendously important because it's only if the creator and sustainer of all things, the God who is revealed as a God of gut-wrenching compassion, if he dies on the cross, then only he can truly stand.

Only his death can stand for all human beings if they accept what he's done. And he's revealed here as he's concerned for the pagans. This is a miracle for the pagans in pagan land.

He doesn't just die for Jewish people, for insiders. He doesn't just die for Christians. He dies for those in Saudi Arabia. He dies for those in North Korea. He dies for those in Rwanda and Uganda and Argentina and Manhattan and the Glebe and Oxford and Cambridge.

He dies for all and he can stand for all. Why? Because he is the creator and sustainer of all things. And it's not just that when he dies on the cross, he merely pays a debt because his life matters in two senses.

You see, if you go back and you read the Old Testament, what our Jewish friends call the Tanakh, and you read it, you'll see that when there is a sacrifice, there's a very important symbolic act.

[ 20 : 57 ] Whether it's the priest acting on behalf of all of the people or whether it's the person offering the sacrifice themselves, there's the animal that's to be sacrificed is to be a perfect animal.

And in a sense, as we know it, looking at animals, an innocent animal. I mean, it's part of the reason that we have, North Americans have a problem with the idea of killing animals, especially those of us in cities like Ottawa who think that meat is produced by a factory and comes out all wrapped in styrofoam and plastic rather than some animal had to die.

But for those who are in the country and are those who like to hunt, they know that an animal had to die. But there is, in a sense, what happens in every sacrifice with the laying of the hands, there is this sense that my shame, my wrongdoing, my lack of covenant faithfulness, the many things that I fail to do that I should, the ways that I have wanted to keep God at a distance or put him far away, the ways that I have wanted to be a God myself, and all of the consequences should fall upon that. In a sense, when the priest or when the person lays their hands on the animal, they're transferring, they're saying that this animal is going to bear the punishment to pay the debt that I owe.

But there's something else that happens when you put your hand on the animal. And that is that, in a sense, the innocence of the animal becomes yours.

[ 22 : 29 ] Now, part of the great mystery of the Christian faith is that, as Jesus said, salvation comes from the Jews. Is it now that we are to understand that after his death and resurrection, when we call out to Jesus and put our hand in the hand of Jesus, when you do that for the first time and become a Christian, there is something that happens.

There is that goes from you to him, the creator and sustainer of all things, the darkness, the brokenness, the hatred, the prejudice, the lust, the gluttony, the sloth and laziness that has made up your life and past, present, and future is laid on him.

And his death covers the consequences of that. But as we see here, he's also, in a sense, the very perfect creator and sustainer of all things, the man of gut-wrenching compassion.

And when you put your hand in the hand of Jesus, his sinlessness covers you. His purity and compassion in his love and his unbroken connection with the Father covers you.

There is this profound exchange when you put your hand in the hand of Jesus. Is it fair? No. Is it just? Yes.

[ 23 : 57 ] Is it compassionate? Unbelievably so. Every single one of us is vastly worse than we've ever dreamed and vastly more loved than we've ever imagined.

And that's what's communicated when you see this story and know that this is the man who will die on the cross for you. How does religion see Jesus?

I began this by telling the story of the fact that on Sundays, the way I grew up, you had to go for Sunday school, then you had to go to church, and then you came home and you did nothing all day, and then you went to church at night, and then you came home and you went to bed, and you woke up the next morning, in my case, saying, thank God it's Monday.

So how does religion meet this? Well, let's look and see what happens. Look at Numbers at the end of verse 10, and immediately he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the district of Dalmanutha.

So basically what he's done is he's taken the boat. Sorry, I'm looking at it from my point of view. From your point of view, he's on this side, and he's now come back to the Jewish side of the Sea of Galilee.

[ 25 : 16 ] And when he gets there, the Pharisees, which are like a denomination within Judaism, the Pharisees came and began to argue with Jesus, seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him.

And just sort of pause here. All of these words are very good, and it would be impossible to take the original language and translate it just word for word into English.

You'd really have to add extra stuff to try to capture what's going on here. When you think, come and began to argue or discuss, think of what Russia has been doing to the Ukraine.

And I'm not exaggerating. And the fact of the matter is, is that the word came is a word from the military, and it's the word used when military leaves rank on rank to go to battle.

That's the word that's being used for came. And when it says that they, losing my place in my notes here, when it says, do, do, do, do, do, do, do.

[ 26 : 20 ] Oh yes, when it comes to say argue, it means to dispute and oppose. Not to have a bit of an argument where you can come to a conclusion, but an argument that will lead you beaten into submission because you want to oppose everything that they say and you want to make sure that you win.

And when it says seeking, it doesn't mean seeking truth or seeking understanding. It means seeking to gain control. And when it says test, it doesn't just mean a test to see what's happening. It means setting up obstacles to discredit. It is Russia invading the Ukraine. So the Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven to test him.

And he sighed deeply. This is another emotional word. It's a deep, from the center of who he is, a sighing of dismay.

So he has this deep sigh of dismay and said, why does this generation seek a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation.

[ 27 : 32 ] And he left them and got into the boat again and went to the other side. So what's going on here? In fact, actually, the original language emphasizes the refusal in Jesus' response.

I mean, we can see it here. Truly I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation. But in the original language, it's even more emphatic. So what's he doing? I will not bow down to your criteria today or ever. He said, with compassion, he is dismayed.

I will not bow down to your criteria today or ever. Because, see, that's what they're trying to do. They want Jesus to fit into their criteria. And this is a deeply human thing.

[ 28 : 46 ] The world, if Jesus doesn't have my views on LGBTQ plus things, and how on earth could he be God? For Muslims, if he doesn't have my criteria about honor and the right things, he cannot be God.

And on and on and on and on. That we human beings, if those of us who are more scientific, if his stories don't sort of match with our understanding as a science and all of that type of thing, which isn't actually science, it comes down to our philosophy.

If he doesn't tick off all of the boxes in my philosophy and in my theology, in my ideology, if he doesn't tick off all of those boxes, then no, he's not God.

And Jesus says, I will not bow down to your criteria. Good grief, he just created matter out of nothing. And how could he be God if he meets your criteria, your criteria, your criteria, your criteria?

And even if he met our criteria, well, all the people in Saudi Arabia would hear our criteria and say, your criteria sucks. Our criteria is better. And all of the people in Manhattan would say, your criteria sucks.

[ 29 : 57 ] Mine's better. And all of the people in North Korea would say, your criteria sucks. Mine's better. How could he be God if he has to bow down to your criteria?

The fact of the matter is, is that some of our criteria are fine, but most of us need to be delivered from our criteria. I have a friend, and he was in his late 30s and still never married a single guy. And one day, one of his friends said, your problem is you have non-Christian criteria about dating and marriage. My friend was a minister. And at first, he was really mad, and then he realized he was cut to the heart.

He was married nine months after that. I have two kids still together.

Most of us have to be delivered from many of our criteria, and Jesus will not bow down to them. He will not bow down to them. Jesus would have played road hockey on Sunday, and my church that I grew up in might have thought that he was not a Christian.

[ 31 : 22 ] And my Muslim friends, he'll wear pants that are long. He might wear them short, but if he does, it's just because he feels like it. Maybe he'll wear short pants one day and long pants the next day just to show you have freedom to wear your pants any length you want.

Maybe he'll grow a big, long beard, and then the next day shade it. Why? It's free. For freedom, Christ has come to set us free. And this becomes even more important as we see this text all come to an end, at least in terms of this particular Sunday.

Look what Jesus says, to bring home my story and all, and the danger there, and to make it a far more human connection.

Look what he does in verses 14. So they get into a boat, and they go to the other side, but here they just, I mean, the lake is sort of shaped like this, and so they've gone to the pagan area.

Sort of all reverse this for you. The pagan area, now it's the right way for you. Now they've come to the Jewish area. Now they go down to another part of the Jewish area. They get in a boat. And now they're in the boat. If those of you have good visual imaginations, you could be screenwriters or cinematographers or directors for plays.

[ 32 : 35 ] There's 13 men in a boat, Jesus and his 12 disciples. They're rowing. Some of them are rowing. And it's a long time, and it's maybe a nice day, and they're just sitting there rowing across the lake.

Verse 14, now they had forgotten to bring bread, and they only had one loaf with them in the boat. And Jesus, so he's just there. I don't know how long they've been out rowing, looking around, everybody thinking their own thoughts.

Maybe if you were doing a movie, there'd be little voiceovers, you know, one guy thinking about himself and saying, boy, they really had good hummus over there. I wonder if I could make it like that at my home.

And another one's thinking about, what did my wife want me to bring when I came back? And maybe another one's thinking about, you know, I'm a better rower than these guys.

Who knows? You know, they're just thinking, okay? They're just thinking. And in the middle of that thinking, all of a sudden, Jesus says, verse 14, and he cautioned them or warned them, saying, watch out, beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.

[ 33 : 48 ] Okay? Watch out. Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod. bread. So now they look around and they begin discussing with one another the fact that they had no bread.

Now, by the way, I mean, basically they're wondering if Jesus is passive-aggressive. You know, passive-aggressive people don't want to tell you off because you didn't bring the bread. So they raise up something like that. It's passive, but it's really aggressive.

And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread?

Now, from here on in the text, because we're just wrapping this up, what we are going to see here is four or five or six questions.

If you're a Christian, these are questions for the rest of your life to examine your conscience. One of the wonderful things about all Christians is this phrase of examining your conscience, that sometimes we need to ask ourselves some questions.

You know, maybe it's early in the morning or maybe it's on a retreat or, you know, maybe it's at a, you know, because some people, the countryside's the right place to do this. For others, a countryside just terrifies them.

[ 34 : 55 ] It has to be a cafe on a busy street with the hub behind them. But they just, you ask yourself some searching, penetrating questions. And here's what we see is that Jesus asks these penetrating questions.

For those of us who are Christians, it's questions for the rest of our lives. And it reveals two great dangers, but it also reveals it in, to their contrast, this profound vision of what the Christian life is. And the Christian life is not either piling on rules upon rules upon rules, nor is it you're taking out all of the things in the Bible that you don't like. But the Christian life is that you're gripped by the gospel and you're called time and time and time and time again to remember the gospel and then to be propelled forward in creativity and insight and wisdom to grow out of that which you remember. It's this dance between remembering and holding fast and questions which propel you into growth and self-awareness.

Listen. So why are you thinking about no bread? here's the question. Do you not yet perceive or understand? Are your hearts hardened?

[ 36 : 18 ] I mean, it's a good thing for me to say to myself, am I really understanding what's going on? Am I really doing it? It's a good thing to ask myself, is my heart becoming hard?

Having eyes do you not see and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember? I mean, we all know one of the common problems is as soon as we've left church we've forgotten all we've learned and all of our commitments.

In a sense, the church is just to help a way to remember that we need to remember together. It's one of the reasons why things like small groups and mentoring relationships are so important because we need help to remember together and ask questions out of remembrance together. do you not remember? And what do you have to remember? Well, when I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up? They said to him, twelve.

And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up? And they said to him, seven. And he said to them, don't you yet understand? So on one hand, this is very frustrating because we'd want, okay, Jesus, you don't have a pen, have a pen.

[ 37 : 37 ] I want you to write the things down right now. Okay? Dum, dum, dum, dum, dum. got it. The problem is when we write it down and get it, we close the book, throw it behind us and go on with our life.

The opening thing was the key thing. Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of Herod. What do you need to do to beware of these things?

You know where, we need to, you need to ask yourself, am I thinking right? Am I looking at things the right way? Am I understanding? Am I remembering the great truths of the faith? And am I understanding?

Right? And we need others to do this. That's why we need church and we need small groups and we need Christian friends and mentoring and discipleships and good Christian books to help us to remember, to understand, and to be propelled.

And the two types of leavens, what he's warning you about here is that there's things which are very, very small, like yeast. Like if you make a sourdough loaf or a big loaf of bread, you don't need very much yeast.

[ 38 : 40 ] You don't need much sourdough to make a sourdough bread. But yet that little tiny bit, when it comes in and it's kneaded in and everything like that, it ends up transforming everything.

And that, and he's saying, in a sense what he's saying is he's saying, beware of religion and irreligion. Beware of religion and worldliness.

It's the Pharisees, the ones who want to add and add and add. Let me tell you, I can tell you this right now. I don't know how many times I've read the Bible from cover to cover, 50 times. There is nowhere in the Bible that says you can't enjoy a sunny day by playing a game outside.

Now, I will stand rebuked and I will repent next week if you show me a text that says that between now and next Sunday. But it's not there. It's not there.

And you see, religion wants to add and add and add and add and before you know it, it's adding things where we've looked at this in other weeks that are just kooky, that they're the opposite of

what the Bible says.

[ 39 : 46 ] Right? Like the fact of the matter is, is if you look at Sabbath keeping, Sabbath keeping is the day where you set it aside for the Lord. You trust that you, the work you need, you think you need to do work, seven days worth of work, but Jesus says, trust me, you can get your work done in six, you can get seven days of work done in six days.

And you trust me with a day and you spend it to gather with other believers to remember and to rejoice and to receive grace. And then the rest of the day, yeah, we'd like you to rest, but we'd also like you to feast.

You know, it's completely forgotten for those who are really, really, really into Lent. If you add up the numbers of days of Lent, you'll see it doesn't add up right. Why? Well, because the Sundays were excluded. The Sabbath is a day of celebration and to feast and to rejoice and to relax and to have people over and have a bit of a party, you know, to be generous, not to have long faces and act like you're a vampire afraid of the sun.

And so the religious want to add and add and add and add and add and add and the world, Herod wants to take away and I don't like that teaching about sex, so snip that away and I don't like this and I don't like that and I don't really approve of that and take that away.

And those are the two types of leaven that can get into your soul and you think you're a Christian, but you've made, you're something completely different. Here's the thing in closing, if you could put it up, Claire.

[ 41 : 21 ] It's a prayer. Lord, Lord, grow in me a penitent, humble, loving, obedient, available, teachable, trusting heart towards you.

I've organized them in a way so that it sort of says float with lots of apologies to English language. That's how I remember it in my prayers.

It's actually a prayer that I try to pray every day. That to you, Lords, towards you, that I might have a penitent heart, that I might have a soft heart for the things that I've done that are wrong.

And that I might be humble before you, that I know you don't have to bow down to my criteria, I need to learn to bow down to you. And it's not about me, it's about you. And I am not the center of the universe.

universe. And I want to not just have a cold relationship with you or a white-knuckle relationship with you, I want there to be love, I want there to be affection, I want there to be delight.

[ 42 : 31 ] And I want to be obedient to your word, I want to remember your word and be obedient to it. And I want to be available to you, not just thinking that you're sort of an addition to my life where I run my life, I want to be available to you because you are my savior and you are my Lord.

And I want to be teachable because I don't know everything and I'm wrong about a lot and I need to keep being taught by you. And I want to trust you. I want to trust you.

That's the world that Jesus asks us to enter into when we trust him as our savior and our Lord. I invite you to stand. Let's bow our heads in prayer.

Father, you know those, you know the ways, some of us, Father, might not be at all attracted about anything in the world but there's stuff about religion we really like. And all of us probably have Father traditions and other types of things that we think are from the Bible but a lot of them are just us and they might be very good for us because of the state of our disorder and chaos but they're just for us.

They're things that you've given us to help your lordship come into our lives. They're not meant to be imposed on everybody as a rule. And you know those things that we sort of like to kick under the carpet, Father, that we don't really like about your word.

[ 44 : 10 ] And you know those ways that we like to appear more righteous than others. Father, we are so thankful that Jesus knows everything about us and still he loves us and still he died for us.

And we thank you, Father, that we don't come before you giving you a long list of the perfect things we've done but we can come before you as your children and we know the final word about us and you see that we're clothed with the righteousness and compassion of Christ and that he has paid the debt that we owe.

And we know, Lord, that you desire us to grow into the clothing that we've been clothed with in Jesus. And so, Father, we ask that your Holy Spirit would help us to be gripped by the gospel and to remember your word and that you would grow within each one of us hearts that are penitent before you, that are humble before you, that are loving before you, that are obedient to you, that are

available to you, that are teachable by you, that trust you.

And Father, we ask that you would grow us into such a people like that and that you would grow us as a church into such a people as that. And we ask this in the name of Jesus, your Son and our Savior.

Amen.