

The Most Important Question

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 January 2013

Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 0 0] blessed be the lord the god of israel who only doeth wondrous things and blessed be the name of his majesty forever and let all the earth be filled with his majesty this is our prayer this morning our heavenly father in the name of jesus christ your son amen please be seated well thank you dan for mentioning my 20th anniversary here thank you for your kind reception to that everyone this is no time to grow sentimental but i am very grateful to god for the 20 years amongst you and for your own faith and hope and love and if i might just speak personally off the cuff which is a very dangerous thing to do it feels a little like for me as though the ship st john's has been through very rapid waters and we've come through the rapids um uh slightly the worst for wear and uh we've come into a smooth sea and uh the captain uh is back on deck and he feels like we should be going this direction and uh that has been the work of the last few months um i said last sunday to to the other congregation the 10 o'clock congregation and we hate them um that uh um i feel the lord has given me a fresh vision for what we should be doing and i wish very much for us to talk about it when uh my strength is there and when we've ironed out the lumpy parts uh as a leadership team so just know that that's coming soon um there are a number of great privileges of being a minister uh one is people don't tell you if you've overstayed you're welcome um and every time i go back to australia i feel more and more like an alien there and more and more like a canadian which i am um the other thing is i have learned far more from you and from the other congregations than you've learned from me and what the greatest privilege of all really is serving christ among you and the weekly discipline of teaching the word of god and i was thinking about this morning's service um thinking i would go through and just pick out some of my favorite pieces from mark's gospel but i thought that was inadequate um as i've come back to mark this time and studied it uh the book is different than i remember it it's a book about how jesus conquers death through his own death and uh what i want to do with you is just look remind you of the last passage that you looked at last year in mark which comes to the confession of peter down there in chapter 8 verse 29 we have been studying mark now for a number of months and as we come to the end of the first half of mark jesus asks this question and this needs to be our question too today who do you say that i am and peter answered you are the christ and in a way that gathers up everything that's been going on in mark's gospel so far very important question when you think about mark if you've read it straight through you know that in chapter 1 god himself answers that question audibly from heaven at jesus baptism and in chapter 15 as jesus is dying on the cross one of the men who crucified him

also confesses him to be the son of god and here we are at the midpoint in mark's gospel and jesus himself thinks it's so important that he pushes it on the disciples he says he says verse 27 who do people say i am and they answer with these comparisons john the baptist or elijah or prophets these are these are humans say that you are and these are the highest possible human comparisons and then he says yeah but who do you say i am and peter answered him you are the christ now those highest human comparisons are all very well but the point is that they are woefully inadequate because jesus is not you can't really understand jesus just in comparison with other great religious figures so that when peter says you are the christ he is saying something quite remarkable and astounding no human has confessed jesus as the christ god's christ the son of god the eternal one it's a very big deal those of you who are with us when we worked our way through one and two samuel i hope you enjoy their time together um what we learned there is that messiah the thing about the messiah is not that he is a great warrior and a great king to his people only but that the messiah belongs to god he is he is god's chosen representative to his people he's like a go-between and a mediator and you remember in 2 samuel 7 god says that messiah will be a son who will rule forever on the throne bringing us into his family so when peter says you are the christ you are the messiah he's not just answering the question of who jesus is he's answering the question of who god is to confess jesus to be the christ is to say that god is the one who sent this jesus this messiah and that god has revealed himself finally and fully through this messiah that god saves and forgives the world and all his purposes and his rule and the point of your life and the point of this world are on this messiah it's very very big you see if jesus is not the messiah he doesn't speak from god he hasn't risen from the dead there's no hope beyond the grave there's no true forgiveness and we are wasting our times on sunday mornings and you can't have turkey and ham in one meal you've got to go back to kosher so if christ is not the messiah life is about all you want all you can get but if he is the messiah as peter confesses here it means that god has fulfilled his long promises and that the forgiveness and mercy he has promised to us is ours and the death is defeated and that our hope rests gladly on him and so this is the question that jesus would press on us however in the passage around i want to dwell with you on on two things see why is it that we don't see this so naturally why is it we're you know sleepy about this why is it that we don't just look at jesus and see the face of god and there are two reasons one's the bad news one's the good news the first is the bad news and it has to do with our spiritual blindness our spiritual blindness and this is the uh this is the explanation of yeast of leaven in the verses uh 14 through to 21

if this is the passage just before if you look at verse 14 jesus and the disciples get into the boat again and the disciples have brought only one bread roll with them and jesus uses the bread and yeast and leaven to teach them a deeper lesson just look back at verse 15 please watch out he says very strong words beware of the yeast or the leaven of the pharisees and the leaven of herod and they began discussing with one another the fact that they had no bread and jesus aware of this said why are you discussing the fact you have no bread do you not perceive or understand are your hearts hardened so from jesus point of view the great danger for his disciples and for us is a hardness of heart a kind of spiritual blindness we use this phrase hardness of heart it doesn't mean a subjective feeling it means how it means a deliberate closing of our eyes to spiritual truth and jesus is worried that his disciples hearts are becoming hard and infected with the yeast of the pharisees and of herod and in the bible yeast is commonly used as a picture for infection and disease and corruption even gangren i once when i first came to canada i didn't like the bread i was used to australian bread and so i made myself some bread and i'd never done it before so i got all the ingredients started from scratch made it up and it didn't seem to rise as it should have so i threw in another handful of yeast and left it overnight for those of you who make bread you'll know what that means i came in the morning and it was like that 1960s movie about the blob you know it was sort of taking over the kitchen this great big thing actually it was semi-miraculous because when i baked it it became the constituency of kevlar it was this very heavy brick and i couldn't cut it however that's not what i'm talking about jesus says watch out for this uh yeast once it gets in our hearts spreads very quickly and if and it affects us until messiah jesus becomes less clear to us and jesus gives two examples of yeast of this corruption the first is the yeast of the pharisees which is a kind of a group think you know what i mean by that um conforming to what everybody else thinks you know those things that everyone assumes just assumes to be true and no one's brave enough to stand up and say that's not true it's a terrible thing school it ruins families it's a woeful thing amongst clergy pharisees had decided that jesus threatened the way that they thought and did things so they had already planned to kill him in chapter three and when they come to him at the beginning of this passage to demand a sign from heaven they're not asking just for a miracle they've seen lots of miracles they've said he does his miracles by satan's power they've got something very specific in mind and jesus sighs a deep sigh it's dismay and despair and he says look this generation has had every privilege i'm not going to give a sign on these terms god is not going to sit up and beg nobody ever becomes a believer by saying to god here are your criteria you've got to measure up because you can't grab the messiah and force him into your worldview and into your demands as though you're at the center because if he is the messiah then he has to be at the center and over the years i confess that i've seen people who come to faith in christ and then gradually they become clear about what commitment to jesus really means and they face a choice

either to worship christ as the center of their lives or to close their eyes to the things about jesus they don't like and it begins a process of hardening their hearts boman and i have a friend who is educated and intelligent and doesn't live in this country so you'll be pleased you can't identify this person and he holds his opinions with absolute certainty in every area of life including those areas he knows absolutely nothing about and i was talking with him not so long ago and there was a woman who was a phd in a particular area and he was giving her his opinion on this area which is was obviously not a right opinion and she started to explain the new concept to him he just simply refused to accept it not based on any facts or knowledge or evidence and that's what a hard heart looks like spiritually it decides what's true and false what's right and wrong based on what it wants to be true and false and right and wrong based on preference and no amount of light and no amount of grace and no amount of truth can penetrate that place

Pascal said that the heart has its reasons that reasons knows nothing about and i think most of us uh believe because we believe what we want to believe and then we build justifications for ourselves and anything that comes along and unsettles us or is contrary must be rejected and you can do it in all sorts of areas of life and your friends will call you eccentric when it comes to the messiah it is both dangerous and hardness and arrogance and this is a picture of the yeast of the pharisees it's a group think and we hold anything over jesus christ as more important than jesus christ then blindness will uh overtake us and it will cause jesus to sigh deeply that's one kind of uh yeast and blindness and the other that jesus mentions is the yeast of herod and uh you remember herod um this is the lie of spiritual neutrality jesus didn't fit fit theologically for the scribes but he doesn't fit morally for herod herod was a sexually compromised man remember like most like many who get to the top of the heap he felt the rules didn't apply to him and his uh his brother had a very attractive wife and so herod just took her and was living openly with her the only problem is that um john the baptist was preaching and he was preaching repentance and that didn't go down very well in the royal house particularly with herodias and so herod had him arrested and you remember at the end of chapter 6 herodias that's herod's uh herod's girlfriend had a grudge against john and wanted to put him to death but she could not for herod feared john knowing that he was a righteous and holy man and he kept him safe when he heard him he was greatly perplexed and yet he heard him gladly it's a great picture isn't it i mean this is a heart issue for herod he's heard enough uh to know what's right but he refuses to get off the fence and so he tries to play this game of spiritual neutrality he wants to live like so many guys on the west coast without any real conviction he enjoys the mental stimulation of hearing john the baptist preaching but he's refusing to act he's delaying he's delaying he's delaying because he finds it easier and convenient to have the word of god at his disposal locked away in the dungeon bringing it out from time to time when he felt like a bit of a lift but it doesn't any doesn't make any real practical difference because to change for herod would have been incredibly inconvenient and this is the yeast of herod it's not acting on what we know is true it's not deciding it's pretending we're neutral it's delaying but delaying is deciding and it leads to john losing his head and i lay this before you because the passage does jesus concerned about hardness of heart this yeast and he's concerned that his disciples are closing their eyes and so he warns them and it works in every one of us in different ways for the disciples the way it works is they're just merely distracted i mean they're just thinking about lunch and jesus looks at them and he says look you've been here through my miracles and my teaching with your physical eyes and ears you've seen and heard what i did but they didn't take it in they didn't give their hearts to it they closed their spiritual eyes to what was really happening you know they're in the boat again they've seen jesus

[17 : 51] feed the 5 000 with the plenty of surplus and the 4 000 and when jesus warns them about the yeast they say what bread yeast they're distracted and it's amazing to see the son of god grieved and blocked as it were by the hardness of heart of his disciples you know the one who can keep to heal the leper and raise the dead so our hearts this is our natural blindness it's a resistance to jesus it's a lack of sight and it's a very tricky thing and a soft heart is a humble heart and hungry for spiritual truth and when we receive when god speaks to us we take action when we can and it means repentance ongoing constant repentance and it's risky and it will take the power of god to continue to open our eyes and so i want to move very briefly secondly from our spiritual blindness to spiritual sight supernatural spiritual sight because i wouldn't want us to go away from this just with the bad news because the because jesus himself has not given up on the disciples and throughout this little passage he says do you not understand yet in other words he's very hopeful that they will one of the very encouraging things about this gospel is that it's written by john mark we believe who failed in the first missionary journey and it comes from peter who failed when he refused to confess christ and really by the end of the gospel none of the disciples really get it and i find that strangely heartening i hope you do as well but this uh this miracle comes to us in a way that i think is remarkable and if you just look down at verses 22 to 26 we have this very strange miracle of the healing of a man who's blind you see in verse 22 some friends bring a blind man and beg jesus to touch him and he takes him away from the crowd and then he takes a healing action in verse 23 and says do you see anything and he says i see men but they look like trees walking around his healing didn't work it's defective in some way i mean is jesus doesn't he have the right formula his battery's low no no it's very intentional of course i think part of the reason is jesus wants to show how difficult it is to come to true spiritual sight that it's going to take a miracle and it does not happen all at once so here is a guy at the end of verse 23 half seeing yeah he sees people but they're fuzzy which i think is where so many of us are so much of the time i know i am i see jesus vaguely i see but then i don't see the point of the miracle verse 24 25 is that jesus does not want to leave us with half sight so he touches the man and you see verse 25 he sees everything clearly what does this mean well it means jesus wants to see who he truly is to confess him to be god's messiah beware of the yeast of distraction groupthink of neutrality it's as we begin to see jesus more clearly that he becomes more clear and i want you to see how hopeful and encouraging this is there's a clock on the back wall and there's great conversation always about how long the eight

o'clock or the 7 30 preacher goes for um you'll forgive me if i make one more reference which is not in the sermon um but i want to i want to point this out to you to encourage you if you look back at verse 19 when jesus is speaking to his disciples he's concerned about he asks them these questions when i broke the five loaves for the five thousand how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up and they say 12 and the seven for the four thousand how many baskets full of broken pieces did you take up and they said seven and he said do you not yet understand now why is jesus asking these questions it's very interesting isn't it that the two feeding miracles the one thing jesus wants them to understand is how much was left over and it's been my strong understanding as we've come through these chapters of mark that the feedings and the other miracles around this place are precisely about the overflow the superfluity the oversufficiency of god's grace for us there is more grace more grace more grace than we can imagine i know our hearts are hard i know our hearts um mind troubles me it's very slippery but god's grace the grace of jesus christ is way more than we can need much more and i think jesus reference to it here is to encourage us that we not remain just hard-hearted that we not remain just half seeing and his grace is sufficient for every single one of us i don't know what this year holds for you for myself even but none of us are too hard for christ his grace is sufficient and i think that's the point it's here that peter confesses jesus to be the christ peter's not perfect he wobbles badly later because the christian life is not one unending uh straight line upwards i mean it's two steps forward one step back three steps forward six steps back it's like that up and down all the time for all of us who are struggling with our hearts we feel like we're half seeing and half hearing and we feel this hardness you're not on your own we're in this together but i want us now as we come forward to the lord's supper to ask the lord jesus christ to make himself real to us are more and more real to us to soften our hearts to ask us to see that his grace is sufficient and he will amen