

4.6.C(31).Correcting Hearts Blinded by Unbelief. Mark 8:11-21.

Mark 8:11-21.

11 The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven to **test him**. ¹² And he **sighed deeply in his spirit** and said, “Why does this generation **seek a sign**? Truly, I say to you, no sign will be given to this generation.”

¹⁷ And Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why are you discussing the fact that you have no bread? Do **you not yet perceive or understand**? Are your hearts

hardened? ¹⁸ Having eyes do you not see, and having ears do you not hear? And do you not remember? 8:11-12, 17-18.

Background:

The task of Shepherding is *leading and guiding*, but consider the difficulty of Kingdom Shepherding, which requires the Shepherd to guide and lead in the unseen realm of the Kingdom, where the sheep are meant to perceive by faith in a world overblown and immediate, which appeals to their fleshly natures to ignore God and simply live in the flesh.

At the very end of this outing, Jesus arrives in Bethsaida with his disciples and heals a “blind

man” (23). This blind man’s journey to regain his sight mirrors the path of the disciples who, though having been reborn into the Kingdom, need to be corrected by Jesus to see correctly. For, as we shall see in this lesson, hearts hardened by unbelief will see incorrectly and come to errant conclusions.

So, let’s learn from the shepherd one of the hardest tasks set before the Shepherd—how to correct *hardened hearts* to improve the vision and teachability of your people!

Walking by Faith or by Sight:

⁶ For to **set the mind on the flesh** is death, but to **set the mind on the Spirit** is life and peace. ⁷ For the mind that is set on the **flesh** is **hostile to God**, for it

does not submit to God's law; indeed, it cannot.⁸ Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. Romans 8:6-8

Paul says that to “set the mind on the flesh” is “death.’ In other words, as disciples walk through life, they are called to walk “by the Spirit”—that is, walking with the Lord Jesus and in submission to his Word.

However, to walk with a mind “set on the flesh” is to walk as if God did not exist, that your goals, your purposes, your needs, your plans, are all led by the “flesh” and its desires. To live in this way is to live as if you are “dead” to God and “blind” to His Kingdom and what he may be doing in the world.

So, we will see Jesus correct the underlying heart conditions which lead to this *blindness* to God's Kingdom and a deadening sense of unbelief.



In the first two cases, Jesus responds to the blindness of the Pharisees, who are walking by the flesh and whose “blindness” to the Kingdom is by choice. Then, Jesus warns his disciples who are also in danger of hardened hearts, even though they have been reborn into the Kingdom.

Correcting Hardened Hearts

Refusal:



Willful

Blindness:

Hardened by
Self-
Entitlement

Displeasure:



Selective

Blindness:

Limited by
Self-
Understanding

Caution:



Illusions of

Growth:

Lifeless Growth
from Self-
Importance

Rebuke:



Blurred

Vision:

Misguided by
Worldly
Focus:

Thus, as a Shepherd of the Kingdom, be prepared to face both types of hardness. Know the underlying causes so that you can also correct those who are outside and in the Kingdom.

Remember the words of Jesus on how to respond to those who are hardened by the flesh. It is far too easy to resort to fleshly devices in trying to correct those who are living by the flesh. But, Jesus says:

It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life. John 6:63

Resorting to long philosophical arguments, generating AI powerpoints or videos, even constructing positive experiences to entice the blind to come into the light of God's Kingdom have no power to "give life"—only the Spirit does. So, follow the example of Jesus.

Focus:

- 1: Unbelief from Self-Ruling Hearts: seeks to define life-truth on own terms. 8:11-12
2. Unsubstantial Teaching: from unbelief is dangerous- religious or political power. 8:13-15

3. Understanding based on Human Experience: blind and misguided. 8:16-26.

Consider:

The Pharisees come to Jesus Mashiach to “argue with him” in one of many forced showdowns in which the adversaries of Jesus attempt to argue with Jesus, having prepared argumentative traps for him and seeking to force him to contradict or disconnect with what he had previously taught. But, we see that Jesus does not do as they expect, and he never argues in the same way that his opponents argue. He questions, clarifies, explains, responds, or even corrects. But, knowing the *lifelessness* of engaging in fleshly debate, Jesus refrains. Instead, let’s discover how he responds to these four cases of heart-hardness.

1. Willful Blindness: Hardened by Self-Entitlement and Selective Blindness: limited by Self-Understanding. 8:11-12

When this group of Pharisees came to Jesus to “argue” with him, it is not that they were unaware of the power works that he had done publicly. In fact, one of their number, Nicodemus, secretly met with Jesus and admitted, “We know that you are from God, for no one else can do the signs that you do unless God is with him” (John 3:3). So, these men seek a sign “to test him” (Mark 8:11). That is, they are not just seeking a “sign” as a proof of authority to then bow down before him. Rather, they seek a “sign” that he may submit to their requests. They test him, seating themselves as judges on the judgment seat. So, we see that they come to Jesus with a sense of *Self-Entitlement*—they have the right to make

demands of Jesus, to require proof as if he is a defendant in their *courtroom*. This sense of entitlement *blinds them to the true identity of* Jesus as Mashiach. For, even if they saw his power and recognized him as God's appointed Mashiach, would they really *fall down before him in repentance and surrender?*

Thus, this especially wicked form of *heart hardness* that empowers the Pharisees by a Self-appointed *entitlement*, forces them to be *willfully blind*—that is, no matter what Jesus did, even rise from the dead, nothing would convince them. For, they are “willfully blind” because they insist that they are “entitled” before God. And, they have the right to interrogate the Mashiach and force him to acquiesce to their demands.

How does Jesus respond to them? He simply refuses to acknowledge their request. By

“refusing” to give in to their requests, he shows that their positions are mere *human appointments* and their rights, human rights. Yes, they can gather social power, but Jesus refuses them any more credence than that. Though they are entitled in this earth, they have rights in darkness and death, with no claim to Jesus nor his Kingdom.

Likewise, the “sign” they ask for would never be enough for them to acknowledge as *establishing and convincing* of Mashiach’s identity. They are “selectively blind,” seeing only what falls within the horizon of their own understanding.

But, that is the problem with the Flesh and the way that it hardens one’s heart with unbelief. The Flesh, trusting in its own “Self-Understanding,” can never know the True God who transcends the limited, fallen, material reality which the Flesh

knows by experience. Thus, the Flesh will only see in its selective blindness:

- **Self-Justifying:** It will only see what proves that its position is “Right” and everyone else is wrong. ‘Of course, Jesus is not the Messiah, because that would mean I have been wrong. But I am always right.’
- **Common Sense:** what is seen must align with my experience and what makes sense to me. “How can a man be born again if it makes no sense to me?”
- **Consensus:** what is seen must be agreeable to the people who have the recognition and the power. “Jesus cannot be the Messiah, because no one I trust thinks so.”

Because those hardened by “Self-understanding” can never recognize or accept anything that is

outside their own personal experience and the experiences of their *tradition* and *community*, that Jesus could be the Mashiach is inconceivable to these Pharisees.

Because, as we have already seen, they have long since *voided* the Word of God to see only what is allowed by their tradition. Ironically, Rabbinic Judaism has further narrowed its understanding of what is acceptable to believe about Mashiach by rejecting anything that might apply to Jesus as Mashiach. So, even though rabbinic tradition accepts texts as Isaiah 53 and Zechariah 12 as being messianic references to the Mashiach, modern Rabbis reject these.

Thus, for those who are resolutely blinded by their own Self-understanding and committed to a *selective blindness*, Jesus has only one response: “he sighed deeply in his spirit” and expresses

displeasure at this “generation” that are all guilty of a collective unbelief. To the generation he condemned, he promised that “no sign will be given this generation” (12). That is, for the Jews who directly opposed and reject Jesus as Mashiach while signs (not the ones they demanded) and miracles (the resurrection) were done performed before them, they still chose to be blind to Jesus Mashiach. Jesus is clear to these so willfully hardened. If you choose to cling to your own Self-Understanding and commitment to always being “Right” and “Justified” before God, expect nothing but silence from him.

However, this “generation” which Jesus denounced has passed, just as the generation which tested God in the wilderness all passed away as well.

You may be a Shepherd raised up to go to the Jewish people, and many will still be “willfully blind” and “selectively blind,” clinging to Jewish entitlement and their collective Self-understanding.

Be ready to reveal Jesus Mashiach to them, because your generation will see sign after unmistakable sign that Jesus alone is Mashiach, the Son of God and the Son of David! Signs to anticipate given to Israel:

- First, be prepared for the “**Rapture**” of the Church and its faithful followers of Jesus Mashiach, though many associated with the Christian church will be left behind.
- Second, the predicted “**Birth Pains**” will increase the pain and rebuke Israel’s sense of Self-reliance and any possibility of Self-Redemption apart from Jesus as Mashiach.

Antichrist, wars, famines, pestilences, and martyrdom will all test Israel and shake its stubbornness before the Lord, insisting that it is forever Right.

- Finally, there will be **a Day** when the entirety of Israel's experience will unmistakably shatter Israel's hardness of hearts, as the nation waits helplessly as its enemies prepare the deathblow. When it **looks upon the face of Jesus**, knowing he is the pierced one (Zechariah 12:10), then it will certainly know as a collective that Jesus is its Firstborn Son and Son it had rejected. Israel too will respond to Mashiach, but not with words but with tears.

So, you who are called to shepherd the people of Israel in the Last Days, time your message to the *sequence of signs* that will unfold before your very

eyes. Also, remember that Jesus Mashiach instructed hard hearts by uncovering the *dissonant areas of their lives*, especially as their “common sense” understanding of the world can no longer explain the signs unfolding before them.

2. Illusions of Importance: puffed up by religious or political Self-Importance. 8:13-15.

Fleshly unbelief blinded the minds of the Pharisees, but Jesus also knew that his disciples were still vulnerable to the flesh. So, he warns them about the ever-present threat of fleshly unbelief.

Fresh from his encounter with the Pharisees, Jesus warns his disciples, “beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod” (15). When Jesus identifies both the “Pharisees” and “Herod” as being corrupted by a *leavening*, he was

making an example of people at the highest levels of importance. Yet, Jesus compared them to producing “leaven”—an active biological agent that puffs up and expands in an unsubstantial way. If the Pharisees are vulnerable to a willful and selective blindness, they spread a worthless, vapid delusion of *importance*—that the things they do and say really “matter,” even though the reality is that they really propagate on people an *illusion of substance, of important work, of significance*. For, whether in the religious realm or the political realm, these puffed up people may produce *airy delights*, but they are as unhelpful to health and growth as selling them *balloons to eat*. So, Jesus cautions against the multiplying effect of this delusion of fleshly Self-importance, which can leaven a community and hollow it out.

All that lasts in the Kingdom is done through the planting of the Word of God as *faith springs up fruitfully* among partners and in households of faith.

But, hear the caution of the Lord Jesus Mashiach. We must never be like the Pharisees or like Herod, powerful leaders in their Religious or Political spheres of power. These men, hardened by a sense of Self-importance, leavened and spread around them an Illusion of Growth, but this was as *airy and lifeless* as the pockets of air filling a leavened loaf of bread!

For, this hardened “Self-importance” not only blinds them, but it also deludes those who are impressed by the appearance of growth, only to realize its lifeless and airy nothingness.

Self-importance and Self-promotion are fleshly sources of power that lead to growth and

progress. However, especially in the kingdom, such fleshly growth, will giving the “Illusion” of importance, are really impressive but empty and lifeless shells.

Case Study: the epidemic of Self-Promotion.

In the late stages of the church, the church forgot the caution of Jesus to be wary of the “leaven” of Self-importance and the spreading delusion of lifeless growth. Instead, enamored with traditions of doctrine and men (usually) who championed these traditions, the church rewarded leaders who were *self-important and self-promoting*. These “great ones” amassed substantial followings, sold many books, and built great institutions. You would think the Kingdom had overtaken the world! But, within a generation, these doctrinal institutions imploded, one by one, as the succeeding

generations became increasingly *fleshly*, until an entire *fleshly and worldly Church* was born. Despite the billions of dollars collected, the libraries of books published, and the vast empires built, the life and fruit of the Kingdom was replaced with lifeless and airy growth.

The Church, enamored with these *self-important* and self-promoting personalities, often saw these leaders of movements defrocked or defiled. The church had been deceived by the “leaven” of these Self-promoters. But, in the Kingdom’s reckoning, where will they be? One Reformer recommended the *eradication of the Jews and the excising from Scripture of the book of James* because it contradicted his theology; another promoter undermined the entire book of Revelation by his learned “hermeneutics.” Where is he now, having passed into eternity?

You who will shepherd Israel as it harvests the world for the Kingdom, hear the words of the Lord Jesus Mashiach: ‘Beware the leaven of the Pharisees and Herod!’ Remember:

- All teaching, including your own, comes from **One Instructor**, Jesus Mashiach, and we are all brothers. You should not be “inventing” your own ideas but always waiting on the Lord for what to teach.
- We are all brothers, so anyone has a right to instruct and teach the Word.
- Even Jesus did not claim that the teaching was “his” but only what was given to him by the Father.
- Do not exalt men or develop reputations, names, and ambitions, claiming “doctrinal lineages” or acquiring followings. For, we have one Father, and we are all brothers.

- If there are relationships that form in the Kingdom, let them be family relationships as shepherds gather households that form into multiplying communities, clans, and permeating entire nations. Of course, pass on the teachings within families.

AT the end of the day, the only name that needs to be exalted is the name of the Lord Jesus Mashiach. (you don't even need to know my name, but its Derek, by the way! God-willing, we will meet each other in the Kingdom soon enough!).

3. Understanding based on Human Experience: blind and misguided. 8:16-26.

Especially when discussing the Words of Jesus Mashiach, it is important to not rely on our *fleshly*

experiences and understanding, even as disciples in the Kingdom of Heaven!

For, after Jesus cautioned his disciples of the ‘leaven of the Pharisees,” the focus of their minds and of their conversation immediately resorted to their fleshly experiences and needs, which misguided them. The disciples were hungry, so they assumed that Jesus was talking to them about yummy bread.

In the later days of the Church, as people became more fleshly and need-driven consumers, this approach to the Bible became very popular. People would seek the meaning of the textual passages:

- From the vantage of their fleshly needs, which became reading priorities.

- From the basis of their own experiences and understanding (which was usually based on a doctrinal tradition Reform, Pentecostal, etc.).

Instead, Jesus expected the disciples to approach the text by faith, seeking the Spirit to help them understand the warning against the “leaven” of the Pharisees and of the Jews.

Question:

Further Discovery:

