

A SIGN FROM HEAVEN

– NOVEMBER 3. – MARK 8:11-26. –

**"Jesus spake unto them, saying, I am the Light of the world; he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."
– John 8:12.**

THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES – the leading religionists and teachers of Jesus' day – were perplexed and troubled by His success in reaching the people. True, those who heard Him gladly were chiefly of the common people, whom the Jewish teachers had come to despise, terming them "publicans and sinners," and refusing to recognize them as brethren. They considered Jesus a competitor and a successful one, and feared, not without a cause, that their own reputations as teachers were becoming tarnished because of the superiority of Jesus as a Teacher, whose "Wonderful Words of Life" touched the hearts of many.

These Pharisees came specially to find fault – "tempting" Jesus. They asked Him for "a sign from heaven." Their real purpose was to belittle the many signs He was giving the people, in the healing of the sick, etc. Ignoring all these, they said, What sign can you give us from heaven? We want a heavenly sign; give us that and we will believe on you.

In order to be able to sympathize to some extent with the chief rulers of the Jews at that time, we must remember how different were the things which Jesus was doing in proof of His Messiahship from the things which they had supposed He would do. The prophecies told many things of Messiah, but they in reading them had given special heed to those which spoke of His glory and of the power that would come to the Jewish nation, and of the blessing which the Jewish nation would ultimately bestow upon all nations, for the blessing of the world during Messiah's Kingdom. They overlooked, and did not study

carefully enough or deeply enough other Scriptures of a totally different kind.

These other Scriptures tell of how Messiah would "be led as a Lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so He would open not His mouth." (He would be "dumb" in the sense that He would not open His mouth to prevent His condemnation and death.) They told of how He would "preach deliverance to the captives," and the opening of the eyes of the blind, but these they associated with the glorious Kingdom rather than with the period of Messiah's being "despised and rejected of men," and of their hiding their faces from Him in shame, in disesteem.

True, they should have studied the Scriptures properly. It might be said that they were not at fault in making this mistake; in one sense that might be true. On the other hand, however, we are to remember that their difficulty really was pride of heart, and a know-it-all spirit. They lacked humility, and therefore were not teachable. The "Israelites indeed," who did accept Jesus' Message, doubtless had similar misunderstandings of the prophecies, but they were open to conviction and ready to be led and guided, and to these the Master's teachings were attractive, blessed, wonderful. They were guided gradually to the correct understanding of each feature of the Divine Plan as it became due, and thus they became ready for the Pentecostal blessing in due time, and manifested themselves as part of the Elect, which God was choosing to be the Bride of Messiah, and joint-heir in His Kingdom.

NO SIGN BUT THAT OF JONAH

Our lesson tells that Jesus sighed deeply and said, "Why doth this generation seek after a sign?" and refused to give them a sign, and departed for the other side of the Lake. Saint Matthew (16:1-4) gives a more detailed account of this question and its answer. Jesus called the attention of the Pharisees to the signs that He was giving in abundance to them, and then said that there would be one great sign

given that nation; but it was not given until Calvary. That "sign" did have a great effect upon thousands of Jews, as is evidenced by the account in Acts of the thousands who were baptized on Pentecost [R5111 : page 313] Day, and subsequently, upon hearing Saint Peter's preaching respecting the death of Jesus, His three days in the tomb and His resurrection on the third day.

Jesus cited the sign of Jonah, that as he was (portions of) three days and nights in the belly of the fish, so the Son of Man would be a similar period in the earth, and as Jonah came forth, so the Son of Man would come forth.

We leave it for Higher Critics to fight out amongst themselves the proposition they raise in opposition to our Lord's statement. According to Higher Critics, Jesus and the Apostles were badly deceived, in every sense of the word; but according to Jesus and the Apostles, the Higher Critics are badly deceived. We prefer to stand by the Word of God, let who will take the "wisdom of men."

THE LEAVEN OF THE PHARISEES

After entering the boat Jesus cautioned His disciples against the doctrine of the Pharisees – He likened it to leaven – yeast. Leaven is a ferment, which spreads, especially in dough for bread. God's Word is Truth, the bread upon which His people are to feed. But they are to use the unleavened bread – pure bread, pure Truth, unmixed with the leaven of human philosophy.

This caution was necessary because the Pharisees were apparently and really the most holy sect or party amongst the Jews. The most earnest and most zealous and most gifted Jews would therefore naturally be attracted to that sect. Its claimed association with the highest and best things made the sect and its teachings the more dangerous, because its bread, its truth, was intermingled with human traditions which would make sick and dyspeptic, and to that extent poison all the minds which received it.

The same lesson is applicable to us today; no matter how holy any denomination of Christians may claim to be and seem to be, we are to remember to beware of their "leaven," their false doctrine – to be on the lookout for it, to avoid it. It is the pure Truth of God's Word that is able to make us "wise unto salvation" and which, the Apostle says, "is sufficient, that the man of God may be thoroughly furnished unto every good work."

Let us all, then, as Christians of all denominations, unite our hearts and minds in full consecration to our Lord and Redeemer to do the Heavenly Father's will; and let us stand free and clear from all the "leaven" in all the various creeds, which in the past have done so much to separate the people of the Lord into six hundred denominations. We deprecate this division as more and more bearing in upon God's people everywhere, and more and more we desire to unite the earnest hearts under one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father over all, and one "Church of the First-born, whose names are written in heaven."

"PERCEIVE YE NOT YET?"

The disciples very stupidly missed the point of Jesus' parabolic statement about the leaven of the Pharisees. They at once thought of literal leaven and literal bread, and noted that they had only one loaf with them and supposed that the Master was upbraiding them. Their mental eyes, their eyes of understanding, were not very widely open, and Jesus promptly and very plainly told them so, and apparently with a measure of chagrin, that after all the teaching He had given them they should be so slow to perceive the spirit of His words.

He reminded them of the miracle of the five thousand fed with the five loaves, and asked them how many basketfuls of fragments they collected. They answered, "Twelve." He reminded them of the other feeding of the four thousand with seven loaves, and asked them how many baskets were taken up. They answered, "Seven." He said, How, then, do you not understand that I was not finding fault with you

for having only one loaf; surely, if I had the power to produce bread before, I have still that power, and could not have referred to your lack of bread.

The same thing is noticeable today amongst the Lord's people in Bible Study frequently; the spirit of our Lord's teachings is often missed altogether by some whose minds center merely around some little incidental. The remedy for this is a closer walk with God; a more careful study of the Divine Word, entering into the spirit of the Master and His work, as footstep followers. In this connection let us not forget the difficult "thorns" which another parable tells us so frequently infest the hearts and minds of God's people and hinder the Word of Truth from bringing forth its proper fruitage. The "thorns" are "the cares of this life and the deceitfulness of riches," Jesus said.

Arriving at Bethsaida a blind man was brought to Him with a desire that He would heal him. Jesus took him by the hand and led him out beyond the village. He spat upon his eyes and put His hands upon him and asked him if he saw anything. He looked up and said that he saw something that looked like trees moving about which he supposed to be men. Again Jesus put His hands upon his eyes and bade him look once more. He did so and saw clearly. The object in employing this method is not clear to us, but quite probably the man himself lacked faith and Jesus was gradually developing it in him. This thought is borne out by the final statement that the man looked steadily, and kept looking for some time, and then declared that he could see everything clearly. Apparently the Lord required the man to exercise his full power of will and to strive to see things.

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