

WATCH WHAT YOU BELIEVE**Matthew 16:1-12****(Read Matthew 16:1-12)**

Intro: Last week I received an email from Beliefnet with the hopeful heading:

“11 Signs a Deceased Loved One is Nearby – Don't miss out on the signs your passed relative is trying to convey to you.”

Now sometimes, if I have time, I read these things – especially if they are particularly intriguing like this one. But, whereas I previously thought Beliefnet was a kind of morning devotional site, I realized otherwise just by the fiction stated in headline and it was quickly confirmed as I read on. It began:

Do you ever feel a presence near you, but don't see anyone around? While it might seem a bit spooky or unsettling, don't fear. Feeling someone nearby without being able to see them might mean a deceased loved one wants to pay you a visit, if only to say hello and ease your mind. They might want to dispel any fears you might have about their well-being; they want to reassure you and let you know they're okay. The spirit world can try to get your attention in many ways, but the following 11 are some of the most common signs that your loved one wants to contact you.

And these were the 11 things – each one was expanded, but I'll not take the time to read any more than the first line:

1. You have powerful visions while meditating.
2. Your senses seem more intense.
3. Electronics suddenly malfunction.
4. You feel them in the room.
5. You get goosebumps.
6. Everything feels surreal.
7. You awaken feeling peaceful and refreshed.
8. You've had dreams about them recently.
9. You think about them more often.
10. You feel watched by someone.
11. You have a sense of comfort.

Let me just say ABC, this is a lie straight from the pit of hell and smells of smoke. When a loved one is gone – they are gone. They don't come back to help you or to haunt you. Don't get me wrong, the spirit world is real and the conflict in the heavenlies between the angels of God and the demons of Satan is ongoing. But it is not our loved ones doing it. For those who know Jesus, when we die we will be with him in heaven. Paul tells the Corinthians, as he pines to be with God, *...we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.* 2 Corinthians 5:8b. So when a loved one dies they are not floating around somewhere out there. But this is a prevalent belief. And it's false. And since some Christians believe it and similar things like horoscopes and other occultist things I think we need to know that we must beware and watch what we believe.

Now, believe it or not (no pun intended), this is not a talk about the occult or succumbing to hocus pocus schemes. This is a talk about knowing what we believe. Specifically it's about watching what we believe. The evil one, the very one who propagated the Beliefnet piece I quoted a bit ago is in the business of deceit and he will go to great lengths make sure he succeeds. That means we need to know what the Bible says, and be aware that Satan will never miss a chance to trip us up. With that in mind, let's look at the text I read as I opened the talk and apply it here.

The Pharisees and the Sadducees came, together, to ask Jesus a question. Jesus knew something was up just by the fact that sworn enemies, came, together, to trip him up. This shows we need to . . .

Watch where the challenge is coming from

- These two religious parties hated each other. One, the Pharisees, knew scripture inside and out and they knew each do and each don't. They were the best of the best, in their own eyes especially. The other, the Sadducees, where the political elite and religion was a convenience when it worked in their favor, and disposable when it didn't. To have them both walking toward him, in cahoots with one another, set the

alarm bells ringing for Jesus. They were up to no good. The scripture says they were testing him. Peterson says they were badgering Jesus. No matter what, they were trying to trip Jesus up.

- We have similar religious parties though they're not called Pharisees and Sadducees. They have similar methods of trying to trip us up and knowing what we believe and what the scripture says, helps us discern when they are trying to trip us up. Sometimes that source of testing is an article online or something like what came to me in email. Remember, I said I'd always assumed Beliefnet was a legitimate source. Now I know otherwise. John tells us *Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, for many false prophets have gone out into the world.* 1 John 4:1. Test the spirits – if something you're hearing doesn't quite sound right – do not discount that – it almost certainly isn't right.

Watch what the challenge is about

- The religious leaders tailed Jesus, nipping at his heels and trying to get him to say the wrong thing so they could bring him up on charges and get rid of him. Ostensibly they came to him looking for a sign. They supposedly wanted a miracle to show he was from God. His response was that they had signs galore and it still wasn't good enough for them – because they really, truly weren't looking for anything more than his demise. The only sign they would get was the sign of Jonah – repent or face the music. In Jonah 3, the prophet went to the evil city of Nineveh and told them *“Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!”* Jonah 3:4b. It was a weird message, but the Ninevites saw the sign and repented and God relented. They saw the sign – but the Pharisees couldn't see it staring them right in the face – because they didn't want to. They weren't looking for a miracle – they were looking for an end to their competition. One writer referring to the sign of Jonah, said, *“No miracle will ever be sufficient to engender faith within those who love their sin and refuse to turn to God. People are being insincere when they say they will believe if they see a miracle, for there is plenty of evidence of the truth of Jesus in the accounts of His resurrection, the spread of the Gospel, and the lives and societies changed by obedience to His message.”*
- Jesus called his questioners an adulterous generation, which in the Old Testament meant a generation which has turned away from the living God and betrayed his love. For such a generation all signs would be in vain. No sign would be good enough. Now generations later, we still live in an adulterous generation that still demands signs, while at the same time missing the signs that are staring them full in the face.

Watch out for stinkin' thinkin'

- (Kathy and Fiona's discovery last summer in the woods)
- Jesus told the disciples to *Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees.* Matthew 16:6. Of course, the disciples being men, instantly thought Jesus was reminding them they had not brought food. But instead he was warning them of the spoilage of false thinking. In Jewish thought leaven is an impure ferment. Yes, bread needs yeast (which is leaven) to raise, but yeast also stands for decomposition. Jesus is saying the teaching of the Pharisees and the Sadducees is compared to the bad ferment which penetrates the entire batch of dough.
- False teaching permeates society until it is normalized and no longer seen as false. G. Campbell Morgan puts it this way, *“Jesus said to them, take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees; take heed of that which is in itself corrupt, and which produces corruption; of that which is in itself disintegrating, and which, communicated to other things will carry on that process of disintegration. Take heed, that is discernment, know it, be acquainted with it; literally - stare at it! And then beware - literally hold yourself against it.”* We need to know the scripture enough to know when corruption is present. We also need to know what the corruption looks like. I'm glad I read that Beliefnet post. I'm glad I know what kind of thinking is out there.
- F.B. Meyer wrote – more than a hundred years ago, *“There is abroad today much teaching which may be compared to leaven. The germs of hurtful and false doctrine are as thick as microbes. Propagated by the agencies of the spoken address and the written page, they produce fermentation and unrest in the young and unstable. We must judge these pernicious teachings, not by their pleasant and innocent appearance, but by the effect on heart and character.”* It's only gotten worse Church. We need to beware of dangerous thinking. At the same time we need to lovingly and carefully confront it with great determination.

Conclusion: Watch what you believe. The example I opened with is just one of many things that are leaven for Christ Followers. Spiritualism as exhibited in the Beliefnet article has been around for most of history – if anyone is familiar with the Ouija Board, we’re talking about the same thing. This kind of stuff is dangerous and we must beware of it.

On Tuesday morning as I looked at my calendar for the week, I noticed, it being June 1, that June is Pride Month. Okay – someone has proclaimed it a month to celebrate LGBTQ+. And it seems we don’t have a choice – its being cast up for all to see in just about every form of media. Unbiblical sexuality is a leaven that has been increasingly crammed down society’s throat for almost 50 years. It has been on TV, in movies, in education, and since that advent of Social Media, EVERYWHERE. Don’t fall for it – watch what you believe. And by unbiblical sexuality I’m not talking just about LGBTQ+ -- I’m talking about sex outside of the Biblical model of an adult man, and an adult woman in the covenant of marriage is unbiblical sex – no matter what society would have you believe.

We need to watch what we believe about politics and finances and integrity and truth and on and on. I can honestly tell you that the Bible has the answers for you so that you can watch what you believe. And that means you need to know what the Bible says. That means you need to know your Bible. And that means you need to spend time in your Bible. Society says wrong is right and right is wrong, but if we know our Bible we can safely watch what we believe. Amen.