

# KEEP THY HEART

A Bible-Based Devotional

Turn to: **Matthew 16:1-12**  
“**Three Types of Unbelief**”

Atheism and agnosticism are very sad. The evidence for Jesus Christ is all around us, and yet many people refuse to see it. The Bible says that without faith it is impossible to please God (Hebrews 11:6); and today, we will see three types or "levels" of unbelief, not just outright denial. *Skepticism* separates those who are outside the church walls from those in the pew. Inside the church, *hypocrisy* separates the lost from the truly saved. And *complete trust* in everyday life separates Christians with little faith versus those with great faith.

**1: Skepticism (v1-4).** The first level of unbelief is that of the skeptic: the atheist, agnostic, or anyone who flatly rejects the claims of Jesus Christ as untrue. Oddly, hatred for Jesus unites the **Pharisees** and **Sadducees**, who would otherwise be enemies. Can you imagine them **tempting** him to **shew them a sign**—perhaps annoyingly? Maybe they were trying to make a fool of Jesus by planning to say, "Not good enough." They wanted a sign **from heaven**, but they ignore the host of signs right in front of them. And Jesus is very patient; He could easily have struck them with blindness or leprosy, or called fire down from heaven on them; yet He graciously refrains.

**(v2)** Perhaps you've heard the expression today: "Red in the morning, sailors take warning; red at night, sailors' delight." **(v3)** They were intelligent enough to **discern the face of the sky**, and you would expect them to be easily able to **discern the signs of the times**; yet they claim they don't have enough evidence. People who reject the Bible often claim to be open-minded seekers of truth, but they are **hypocrites**; they're interested only in the truths that suit them, and they discredit the rest. They may say, "If only I had a single piece of clear evidence for the Bible, I would believe";

yet so many **signs of the times** are all around them. Jesus miraculously healed many people; He spoke with supernatural power; what was wrong with those signs? And today, what's wrong with the incredible evidence of design from creation, the supernatural power of the Scriptures, or the historical evidence supporting the resurrection of Jesus Christ? Nothing; the problem is with the hypocritical heart of the skeptic.

**(v4)** Jesus exposes the *real* reasons behind their unbelief; the first is a **wicked** heart. The reason people refuse to believe in Jesus Christ is that they want to hold on to their sin; they don't want to think about their accountability to God. They're also **adulterous**; the horribly indecent, immoral media of our day is clouding the judgment of so many in spiritual things, and it actually makes them act as though they are drunk (Revelation 18:3). And like an adulterous spouse, they are looking for any reason to justify their rejection of God (Matthew 19:3). To such people, Jesus explicitly gives but one sign: **the sign of the prophet Jonas**, or His resurrection after three days. If you're an honest skeptic, then diligently research the historical evidence for the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and try to disprove that. Jesus then **left them, and departed**; sometimes, we need to know when to stop arguing with skeptics and just walk away.

**2: False teachers (v5-6).** While the first type of unbelief is usually found outside the church walls, the second is all too frequently found *inside* the church today. This is the unbelief of the hypocrite, the fake Christian.

The poor disciples—can you imagine them as they **were come to the other side**, just then realizing **they had forgotten to take bread**? Maybe you've been on a road trip and realized you forgot something important, but only after you're well on your way! Perhaps their tempers are a little short and their blood sugar a bit low.

**(v6)** Interestingly, false teaching within the church comes in many forms, from that of **the Pharisees**—with their hypocrisy, proud "spiritual olympics," and loose treatment of the

Word of God—to that of **the Sadducees**, with their denial of the resurrection, with likely an impersonal and highly intellectual view on God. Let's be careful to avoid all the various types of leaven today.

The disciples were hungry; and likewise, spiritually hungry people need to be especially warned about bad leaven. A lonely person is susceptible to being won over by a friendly cult. We need to warn them that while the bread may smell good, it is poisoned and will kill them.

**3: A lack of trust (v7-12).** The first two types of unbelief are found among the unsaved, both outside and inside the church. This last type is something that distinguishes Christians with a little faith from those with great faith. All true Christians trust Jesus Christ; but sometimes we still get worried and don't trust Him as faithfully as we should to take care of us from day to day.

The convicting thing is that the disciples' reasoning, which Jesus reproves, actually makes human sense; the Pharisees were mad, and maybe Jesus is warning them not to eat their bread, like warning someone not to drink coffee that a server has spit into. Maybe the Pharisees were mad enough to try to poison them! But Jesus will show that their *reasoning* didn't have nearly enough trust in God, even though it might sound reasonable at first.

**(v8)** They had some **faith**, but only a **little**. Of course, we would say that Jesus can take care of us, and we even know it to be true in our minds. Yet somehow, I think we often allow seeds of doubt to remain in our **reasoning** process; and unbelief can take many forms. The centurion was commended for his simple, child-like faith in Jesus (Matthew 8:8-10) which positively affected his reasoning process. Is our trust in Jesus Christ implicit, similar to our unquestioned trust for laws of physics like gravity, for example? It isn't so much what we *say* we believe, or even consciously know in our hearts is true; but it is more about trusting Jesus Christ subconsciously, deep within our hearts and throughout our entire thinking process at the core. I know sometimes I don't do that nearly enough, since I still get worried

about things when I shouldn't (Philippians 4:6, Matthew 6:25).

**(v9)** So how can we "grow" our faith (Luke 17:5ff)? First, we must **understand**; learn all you can from the Bible. God has taken care of lots of Christians throughout the ages. Strive not just to *know* the verses, but to *understand* them as well; e.g., instead of thinking, "Oh, neat—God stopped the sun for Joshua's battle," rather think, "Wow! If God could stop the sun for Joshua's battle, then surely He can take care of me in this situation..."

Second, **remember** what Jesus has done in your life specifically. Remember the special miracles He has done for you in the past, and really consider them; things that couldn't have just been coincidence, the times He helped you at the last minute. Has He changed? Isn't He the same today as He was then?

**(v10)** Jesus reminds the disciples of *two* specific providential events in their past; and if you've been saved for a while, I'm sure you've seen God work in your life more than once, and often, even in a very similar situation to what you face today (lack of bread in the disciples' case).

**(v11)** If we do these two things, it will help us get rid of the remaining strands of unbelief entrenched in our reasoning processes; **how** could it not? Then we will focus more on the spiritual (**doctrine**), and less on the physical (**concerning bread**). **(v12)** Then the "light bulb" comes on and we **understand** what Jesus wants for us.

Unbelief is all too common. There's (1) the obvious unbelief of the skeptic who flatly denies the Bible. Such will send a person into the front door of hell. There's (2) the more subtle unbelief of the wolf or fake Christian in the church who claims to love Jesus but is actually a hypocrite. That type will also send a person to hell, just through the back door of hypocrisy. And then there's (3) the traces of unbelief left in a Christian's heart, not trusting Jesus with every situation as well as we ought, which affects our reasoning process in subtle but important ways. Let's strive to be full of faith (Acts 6:5) in every area of life.