**DO YOU STILL NOT UNDERSTAND?**

Matthew 15:29-16:12

Key Verse 16:8-9 “*…Jesus asked, “You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? Do you still not understand? Don’t you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered?”*

If you have been to the CN Tower, you are probably familiar with the famous Glass Floor. It is made of silica glass that is only 2.5 inches thick yet it can support the weight of 35 moose (or 3.5 killer whales). All the science explaining how it can be so strong is posted on the boards right next to the glass. You can stand, jump, dance, somersault, or even moonwalk on the floor but many people will not even dare set foot on it. The moment they look down at the 342m of space beneath them, they are totally gripped with fear. Oddly enough, it is usually the little children and young kids who step on it while adults keep their distance… so Jesus is definitely onto something when He tells us to have child-like faith. When my uncle, a mining engineer from South Africa who knows how strong these minerals are came to visit, we took him to the CN Tower and the Glass Floor. Yet he could not bring himself to step on it either. Once he looked down, he forgot everything he knew and trusted about silica because the fear of falling though had completely seized him. Our faith operates in the same way. Faith in Jesus is not just conceptual; it can carry us through so much in life yet we often fail to use this great spiritual resource out of fear, worry and our anxieties over all that we face in life. Only by truly understanding and remembering what Jesus has done for us are we able to overcome our fears, our struggles and look beyond our immediate circumstances. Let us hear Jesus’ words, “You of little faith,” remember what Jesus has done, and grow evermore in faith.

Look at verses 29 and 30, **“Jesus left there and went along the Sea of Galilee. Then he went up on a mountainside and sat down. Great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others, and laid them at his feet; and he healed them.”** As Jesus left the area of Tyre and Sidon, word of His presence had spread throughout the area to the point that great crowds flocked to Him. Many came with all sorts of physical ailments and afflictions but what they needed most was the inner healing that only Jesus could give. One would think that Jesus would have been tired from all this by now. He and His disciples had left Israel to avoid the pressure of the crowds and the ever-watching eyes of the Pharisees. Even while being in a Gentile area, it seemed Jesus could not find any peace and quiet there either. But Jesus never turned away those who came to Him. Jesus never missed an opportunity to reveal God’s love to those in need of it and did so by healing each and every sickness and handicap brought before Him to the amazement of all who had gathered. What a wondrous scene it was; the formerly lame casting their crutches aside while leaping for joy, the blind tossing away their bandages as their eyes took in all that was taking place, the mute now singing songs of thanksgiving, etc. It was indeed so wonderful that the people gave praise to the God of Israel even though they were Gentiles (31).

At this point Jesus could have said to the crowd, “My work here is done. Time for you all to head back home.” But out of His compassion, Jesus saw how this crowd of over 4000 had followed Him for three days and had nothing to eat. We learned the meaning of compassion a few weeks ago when we studied how Jesus fed the 5000. Jesus felt their pain, their suffering and, most apparently their hunger. Jesus knew how they all came to Him because they had nowhere else to go and no one else they could turn to. Out of His divine compassion, Jesus wanted them to find true rest in Him. And just like when He fed the 5000, Jesus wanted His disciples to have that same compassionate heart for all of God’s flock. Sadly the disciples hadn’t taken to heart what Jesus taught them through the feeding of the 5000. If you look at the two events side-by-side, they strikingly follow the same pattern. Jesus has compassion for the crowd and want to feed them. The disciples despair over where to find the food. Jesus calls on them to bring whatever they could find. The disciples bring seven loaves and a few fish. Jesus gave thanks for what they had, blessed the food and gave it to the disciples to then give the people. Everyone there was fed and was satisfied with many basketfuls still left over. So what is the problem with the second instance? The disciples’ faith had not grown at all.

It is one thing to doubt in Jesus’ power to provide the first time when He fed the 5000. Yet here, the disciples are faced with the same scenario (a smaller crowd no less), the same Jesus and already had the benefit of experiencing His power to provide first hand only a few weeks earlier. You would think that as soon as Jesus said “they have nothing to eat,” the disciples would spring into action as they knew exactly what Jesus wanted them to do. Still, their response to the situation was exactly the same as before. Their lack of faith caused them to act as if they had never witnessed the feeding of the 5000 at all! This reminds me of the movie, “Men in Black.” In the movie, secret agents carry around a device called a “neuralyzer” that when aimed at a person, causes them to lose all memory of things that just took place and carry on as if nothing ever happened. Our lack of faith operates in the same way. Rather than trust in God’s eternal goodness and provision (Matthew 6:33, Romans, 8:28, Philippians 4:6,13), we forget all the ways He has blessed us in the past and doubt whether He could help us now or in the future. Think back to the Israelites in the desert. Even though God was with them, protected them and cared for their every need, every new hardship filled their hearts with complaints and resentments towards God to the point where they accused God of purposefully bringing them out into the desert to die (Exodus 16:2-3). We are no different from the Israelites. When we lack faith in God, we cannot hold onto any of His promises. We place all our burdens in life on ourselves rather than cast them onto Jesus because we neither believe He cares for us nor that He will shoulder them for us (1 Peter 5:7, Psalm 55:22). We are left to determine everything for ourselves and as we shall tragically see in the next chapter, the end result is very damning.

Look at verse 16:1, “**The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven.”** We see these two groups mentioned so many times that it is easy to think of them as one and the same. However, these two groups were mortal enemies with several key differences that affected their very outlook on God and faith. Pharisees were strict preservationists of orthodox Judaism. At a time when it seemed as if the whole world was embracing Greco-Roman culture, they sought to preserve Jewish religion, culture and identity through strict observance of the Torah and absolute obedience of the Law. They wanted to separate themselves from the contaminations of Gentile culture, hence why even their name “pharisaioi” is derived from the Hebrew word “parash” which means “to separate.” Our modern day equivalent would be the extreme legalists who place keeping God’s law as the most important thing to do so you can be saved. Sadducees where the opposite. While they agreed on the authority of the first five books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy), they rejected all the oral traditions the Pharisees held on to, many of their laws and denied all forms of supernatural things like angels, spirits and even the resurrection of the dead. They were more concerned with aligning themselves with their Roman colonizers so they could continue being the ruling class of their time. Their equivalent would be the liberal theologians who claim there is no hell, that everyone will go to Heaven and downplay anything supernatural like miracles as this is a more appealing message/doctrine to the non-Christian world. Although these two groups were worlds apart, there were two things they could unite on; 1) they hated Jesus and 2) they had to get rid of Him somehow. So they conspired amongst themselves and asked Jesus for a sign.

What kind of sign were they looking for? Perhaps they wanted Him to cause the sun to stand still in the sky—as it did in Joshua's day. Perhaps they wanted Him to cause fire to come down from heaven and consume an offering—as it did in Elijah's day. Or, if Jesus was truly the Messiah, He would perform the signs spoken of in the book of Joel, “*I will display wonders in the sky and on the earth. Blood, fire and columns of smoke. The sun will be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes*” (Joel 2:30-31). But hadn’t Jesus performed enough signs? All His healings were in accordance with what Isaiah said the Messiah would do (Isaiah 35:5-6). The religious leaders themselves were witnesses when Jesus healed the man with the shriveled hand and the demon-possessed woman on the Sabbath (Mark 3:1-6, Luke 13:10-17). And they had already asked this same question back in Matthew 12. They kept insisting on a sign so they could test Jesus. The word used here for test (peirazo) is the same word used to describe Satan’s actions when Jesus was in the wilderness, indicating that no sign would ever be good enough for them for no sign would ever help them to believe in Jesus.

Knowing their evil intentions and what was in their hearts, Jesus gave a scathing rebuke in verses 2 through 4. Jesus mocked their ability to expertly interpret trivial things but utterly fail to see what is most important. Because of their spiritual blindness, they couldn’t interpret the sign of the times; that this was the time of the Christ, the Saviour whom all the Scriptures pointed to and whom all the Prophets longed to see His day. Yet here He was, standing right before them… and none of them believed Him. He was so close, they could literally touch God if only they would draw near Him, if only they would reach out and touch Him… but none of them did. They all kept their distance both figuratively and spiritually, choosing to remain in their unbelief. Jesus called them a wicked and adulterous generation (4). Such people should not ask for signs. They need to repent of their sins of pride and unbelief before the truth of God’s Holy One. The only sign Jesus showed them would be the sign of Jonah, that being His death on the cross and His resurrection from the grave.

After rebuking the religious leaders, Jesus left them and went away. He and His disciples went across the lake by boat. It seems that they left in a hurry, and the disciples forgot to take bread (5). When they realized this, they suddenly lost all the grace of Jesus from their hearts. They began to feel guilty for their mistake and nervous about the future. What would they eat for breakfast? Why didn’t they store any of the leftover bread from the 4000? But Jesus said to them, **“Be careful. Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees”** (6). However, when they heard the word “yeast,” they immediately associated it with bread. How many times have we completely missed what Jesus is trying to say to us or teach us because our minds are completely set on other things? The disciples concluded that Jesus was rebuking them for not bringing bread. They felt even more guilty and anxious. They had totally misunderstood Jesus’ words and missed the point of His teaching.

How did Jesus help them understand the true meaning behind His warning? Let us read verses 8 to 12 together, **“Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, “You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? Do you still not understand? Don’t you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? How is it you don’t understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.” Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”** Jesus would specify the teaching as “hypocrisy” and “influence” in Luke 12:1 but in the context of what we have studied the last two Sundays (and what we will study next week), this can also be interpreted as unbelief. While they differed in scale, the disciples’ reaction to the prospect of feeding 4000 and the religious leaders’ demand for signs are similar for they are both rooted in lack of faith in Jesus. Even though both groups saw many miracles, they failed to hold onto the true lesson Jesus revealed through them. The doubt of the disciples and the pride of the religious leaders are simply two sides of the same coin illustrating the two ways we live when we have little faith in Jesus Christ

However, notice how often “remember” and “understand” are used synonymously. Jesus emphasized how essential it is for us as believers to remember and truly internalize what He has done in our lives. It is so easy to forget when hardships arise in life or when difficult situations put our faith to the test. In these times, we can pray to God to increase our faith (Luke 17:5-6) and help us overcome our unbelief (Mark 9:24). All we have to do is ask, bringing the little that we have before Jesus and He will graciously give us in abundance as He always does. What Jesus treasures most is a humble and genuine trust in Him. Though the disciples were with Him 24/7, they were very slow in their faith. Though the religious leaders knew a lot about God, they did not truly know God or God’s heart so their faith was no faith at all. Yet we have this amazing privilege of His Spirit dwelling within us as proof that Jesus is always with us and will deliver us through every trial we face if only we remember and believe.

Do you want to have greater faith in Jesus? Remember what Jesus has done. Jesus died for our sins and rose again from the dead to give us victory over death, eternal life and the glorious hope in the kingdom of heaven. Do not hold onto your fears, your failures, or give in to the hard situations you face. Instead, always remember what Jesus has done for you and live by faith in Him all the days of your life.