**DON’T YOU REMEMBER?**

June 28, 2020

Mark 8:1-21

Key Verse 8:18 “Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don’t you remember?”

Winston Churchill said, “Those who do not learn from history are bound to repeat it.” What he means is that if we do not learn from past mistakes, we will repeat the same mistake. Those who do not remember the past history repeat the same mistake again and again. When the Israelites made the great Exodus from Egypt, they praised God. But when they had small difficulty with lack of water in the desert, they forgot all God’s mighty work and began to be fearful, and complained that they would die of thirst. When they crossed the Red Sea as on dry land, they praised God loudly. But when their legs hurt and had nothing to eat, again they forgot all the mighty work God had done for them and began to complain, “If only we had died in Egypt! There we sat around pots of meat and ate all the food we wanted, but you have brought us out into this desert to starve this entire assembly to death.” When they did not remember what God has done in the past, the entire generation perished in the desert except Joshua and Caleb. 1 Corinthians 10:6 says, “Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.” May God help us to remember what God has done in the past. If God has been faithful in the past, he will be faithful in the present. If he has provided in the past, he will provide in the present. In today’s passage, Jesus helped his disciples to remember the previous miracles so that they may open their spiritual eyes to see who he is.

Look at verses 1-2. “During those days another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said, ‘I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat.’” There were about 4,000 people. You may say that this is similar to Jesus’ feeding the 5,000 in chapter 6, and we have nothing to learn here. But as we will see later, this miracle serves as an important event to open the disciples’ spiritual eyes and ears. When Jesus fed the 5,000 in the chapter 6, the crowds were all Jews. Now Jesus is in the region of Decapolis, and people who gathered are mostly Gentiles. Why had they been following Jesus around the countryside for three days? I think we can find the answer if we look back to Mark 5 and the poor man who was tormented by a legion of demons. Jesus cast the demons out into a herd of pigs in this region of Decapolis. After Jesus cast out demons, people were scared and told Jesus to leave their town. But this man went to all the cities of the Decapolis telling people how Jesus had changed his life. These people had known this man as a crazy guy who didn’t wear clothes, lived among the tombs, cut himself, and couldn’t be restrained with chains. They saw the amazing transformation, and they came to Jesus. So this is the result of the formerly demon-possessed man’s evangelism.

The crowd of people were mostly helpless people with their physical ailments as well as with their sin-sicknesses. Jesus saw their damaged human condition and oppressed spirit. Jesus healed many sick people (Mt 15:30). Jesus served them by teaching the word of God for three consecutive days. Many did not have any Bible knowledge. Therefore, Jesus spent three days to teach some basic truths of God. It was an intensive conference. But Jesus believed that they would be well if they accepted the word of life. Jesus believed that the word of God would plant new hope and new life in their despairing hearts. So with great passion and enthusiasm Jesus taught them three days straight. Look at verse 3. “If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance.” Jesus loved the crowd, for they were eager Bible students. Even after three days of an intensive Bible conference without food, there were still more than 4,000 people gathered. How did the disciples respond? Look at verse 4. “His disciples answered, ‘But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?” If they remembered what Jesus did in feeding the 5,000 with the five loaves and two fish, they would have said, “You can feed them, sir, as you did before.” But they expressed their helplessness. It shows their spiritual dullness. They were slow learners. Sometimes when we look at others, there seems to be no spiritual progress and we get discouraged or disappointed. We need faith and spiritual eyes to see others as Jesus saw his disciples. We must have faith and hope in God and continue to plant his living word in others and pray for them. Jesus’ disciples often looked like they were never growing or never changing. However, they were slowly growing in the compassion of Jesus. Therefore, we should not despair about ourselves, our children or our Bible students but keep on teaching the word of God as the fundamental solution to all life problems.

Jesus knew that his disciples had no resources to feed the 4,000. But Jesus treated his disciples as his coworkers and asked them for their opinion about how to feed them Look at verse 5. “‘How many loaves do you have?’ Jesus asked. ‘Seven,’ they replied.” It seems to be useless to ask his disciples who had no resources. But it was the beginning of coworking. When we ask others’ opinion, it can be the beginning of working together and building a relationship. Humanly speaking, it was impossible for Jesus to feed the 4,000 with 7 loaves and a few small fish. What did Jesus do in this impossible situation? Look at verses 6-7. “He told the crowd to sit down on the ground. When he had taken the seven loaves and given thanks, he broke them and gave them to his disciples to set before the people and they did so. They had a few small fish as well; he gave thanks for them also and told the disciples to distribute them.” Jesus prayed to God and depended on God believing that he would feed them. What was the result? Look at verses 8-9a. “The people ate and were satisfied. Afterward the disciples picked up seven basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. About four thousand men were present.” When Jesus prayed and the disciples worked together with Jesus, God blessed them and they could feed the 4,000 hungry people. They not only fed them. They also picked up seven basketfuls of leftovers. Those who came to Jesus were fully satisfied.

Look at verses 9b-11. “After he had sent them away, he got into the boat with his disciples and went to the region of Dalmanutha. There the Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven.” Here, a sign from heaven may refer to fire from heaven such as in the time of Elijah and Moses, or stopping the sun as Joshua did. They did it to discredit Jesus. Woody Allen said, “If God would give me a clear sign, I would believe. Like making a large deposit in my name at a Swiss bank.” Even if Jesus showed these miracles, they would not believe. Unbelief will always find a way to reject the truth and drive itself down deeper into darkness. Jesus saw this and said in verse 12, “He sighed deeply and said, ‘Why does this generation ask for a miraculous sign? I tell you the truth, no sign will be given to it.” Jesus sighed out of deep sorrow for their unbelief and miracle-seeking mentality. Then Jesus left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side.

While they were in the boat, what was in the disciples’ mind? Look at verse 14. “The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat.” They were thinking about the leftover bread they had forgotten to bring. The disciples had just eaten with the 4,000 but now when they were hungry again, they began to worry about their next meal. They regretted that they had forgotten to bring the leftovers. Maybe they began to rebuke and blame each other for not remembering to bring the bread. We can imagine what it was like: “Andrew, I thought you were in charge of the leftover bread.” “No, Peter was in charge. I clearly heard Jesus tell him to bring the bread.” “Andrew, you must be mistaken. I heard Jesus tell James to bring the bread.” What did Jesus say to them? Look at verse 15. “‘Be careful,’ Jesus warned them. ‘Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod.’” As we know, yeast is so small it is nearly invisible, but once put into dough, it influences the whole batch. Likewise, unbelief is highly contagious. When Moses sent out 12 spies to explore Canaan, Joshua and Caleb had faith in God that they could conquer the promised land. But the other 10 spies had no faith. They saw themselves as grasshoppers and the Canaanites as giants, and they spread their unbelief to the entire Israelites so that all the Israelites rebelled against God. Likewise Jesus worried that the unbelief of the Pharisees could plant doubt and fear in the hearts of young disciples.

How did the disciples understand Jesus’ warning about the yeast of the Pharisees and Herod? They discussed this with one another and said, “It is because we have no bread.” Look at verse 17. “Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked them: ‘Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened?’” First of all Jesus rebuked his disciples for worrying about bread, and for their hardened hearts. Jesus had already performed so many miracles. What are they? Jesus drove the demon out of a man in the synagogue. Jesus healed a man with leprosy and a paralytic. Jesus calmed a stormy sea. Jesus raised Jairus’ daughter from the dead. Jesus fed the 5,000 with 5 loaves and 2 fish. Jesus walked on water. Jesus healed the Greek woman’s daughter and a deaf-mute man. Jesus fed the 4,000 with 7 loaves. Through these miracles, Jesus showed that he is the Son of God with endless compassion for those in need. Did the disciples need any more proof to trust in him? The disciples should have believed that as long as Jesus was with them everything would be fine. But whenever they confronted problems they completely forgot who Jesus was and what Jesus had done. Instead they were filled with worries and anxieties. To Jesus, their real problem was that they did not remember what Jesus had done. The disciples should have found the spiritual meaning of Jesus’ miracles and had it permanently imprinted on their minds and hearts. One of the basic convictions is this: Jesus, the Bread of Life, will feed us. Jesus has the infinite supply of God’s provision. Even in very tough circumstances, we can say, “And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus” (Php 4:19).

Look at verse 18. “Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don’t you remember?” Jesus may have been tempted to dismiss his disciples and call new disciples. If it was the case, we would have been dismissed as Bible teachers a long time ago. But Jesus is different. He patiently taught his disciples again and again. Look at verses 19-20. “When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?” “Twelve,” they replied. “And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up? They answered, “Seven.” He said to them, “Do you still not understand?” Jesus reminded them specifically of the two events of feeding the 5,000 and feeding the 4,000. Jesus helped his disciples to remember what he had done. Through these two events, Jesus wanted them to learn God’s love, compassion and provision in any situation. Jesus wants us to approach human problems by remembering what God has done in our lives. Isn’t it astonishing that in the present moment, in the stress of the present moment, we forget the fulfillments of God’s care in the past? “Why in the world are you thinking about what ifs and all the worst case scenarios when you ought to think about God’s grace in the past and trust in God?” But Jesus is gentle with us. He says, “Do you still not understand,” as if to say, “What more do I need to do?”

The symptoms of spiritual ignorance are forgetfulness and worry. We should remember what God has done in us and through us. Then we can believe that God will be there for us in the present and in the future. One key difference between believers and unbelievers is this: a believer remembers God through events in life—even painful events in life. But unbelievers cannot see God. They remember painful events in life. These memories keep coming back and haunt them. In the book of Genesis, Joseph had a very terrible life. His mother died early, so he grew up without a mother. At the age of 17 he was sold as a slave. A woman falsely accused him of rape and he was put in prison. In his life struggles he had so many painful moments. But he remembered God. When he had his first son, he named him Manasseh and said, “It is because God has made me forget all my trouble and all my father’s household.” The second son he named Ephraim and said, “It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering” (Ge 41:51,52). Likewise, by God’s grace we forget what we should forget and instead remember God’s goodness. When we remember God’s faithfulness in the past, we can face the future without fear. When I think about how God provided so far, it is amazing. God helped me to finish my Ph.D. when I almost failed my qualifying exam. I never received financial support from my parents and parents-in-law since I got married. I can believe that God will continue to provide all my needs.

In this passage we learn that those who remember what God has done can overcome any situation and live a victorious life. On the other hand, those who do not remember what God has done become slaves of fear and anxiety. May God help us remember what he has done and live by faith with assurance of God’s blessing throughout our lifetime.

Big Idea: Remember what God has done.