

“DON’T YOU REMEMBER?”

Mark 8:1-26

Key Verse: 8:18

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

After finishing his Galilean ministry, Jesus focused more on raising his disciples. Though Jesus had revealed himself as the Messiah in many ways—through his life, his teaching and his miracles—the disciples did not really know who Jesus was. So at this time Jesus helped them more intensively to understand who he was, until they could confess him as the Messiah. In the course of doing this, hindrances arose. These came through the bad influence of the Pharisees and Herod, which impacted Jesus’ disciples negatively. Helping them overcome bad influence was a painstaking job for Jesus. It would be easy for Jesus to become upset with his disciples. But Jesus wisely counseled them to remember what he had done in the past so that they might not remain under bad influence, but grow to be like him. In our times, we seem to be swimming in a sea of bad influences. During Bible study we feel close to Jesus and have a desire to grow as his disciples. But afterward we can easily succumb to some kind of bad influence and forget God’s grace and lose our spiritual desire. We must watch out for the bad influences that hinder our spiritual growth. What are they? How can we break free from them and grow to be influential men and women of God in our time? Let’s listen to Jesus’ heartbreaking questions: **“Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don’t you remember?”** Let’s take Jesus’ words seriously so that we may grow to be like him.

First, Jesus shared his compassionate heart with his disciples by feeding four thousand people (1-10). This is the second feeding in Mark’s gospel. The feeding of the five thousand in chapter 6 and this event are similar in many ways. But when we observe this passage carefully we can also find some significant differences. This event seems to have taken place in the Decapolis, which means the crowd was largely Gentile (7:31). In this event, Jesus initiates the feeding, while in the previous event, it began with the disciples. In this event, Jesus expressed his compassionate heart to his disciples explicitly and intentionally, while in the previous event it was implied. There are many more differences. Look at verses 1-3. During those days another large crowd gathered. Wherever Jesus went, both Jews and

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Gentiles came to him because they knew he was their good shepherd. Jesus is not only the Messiah of the Jews, but of the Gentiles too. They were thirsty for the Messiah’s love, healing touch and words of truth. So they stayed with Jesus for three days, but it seemed like just a short time to them. Jesus knew that they were hungry and that they had no food. So he 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. If I send them home hungry, they will collapse on the way, because some of them have come a long distance.”** Jesus was not burdened by the people who followed him persistently, not allowing him to rest at all. Rather, Jesus had compassion on them. He was happy that they had listened to him teach the word of God so earnestly. He was considerate of their hungry stomachs and the fact that they had to travel long distances. We sometimes think that Jesus is only concerned about our souls as the Messiah. But he is concerned about the whole person.

Here we see Jesus’ deep humanity. As a human being, Jesus understood people fully and had great compassion. Jesus cares about the needs of our whole person practically, such as material needs, mental and physical health, character development, emotional needs, marriage and family, school and job problems, and so on. Jesus understands our sorrows and agonies, and helps us, as our merciful and faithful Messiah (Heb 2:17). Why did Jesus share his compassionate heart with his disciples? He wanted them to grow as compassionate shepherds for God’s people. Among many things to learn from Jesus, his compassionate heart is most essential. One Bible teacher confessed that he quietly hopes his Bible student will leave right away after finishing their study. Subconsciously, he says to himself, “Bible study is over. Don’t hang around. I need some rest.” We need to learn Jesus’ compassionate heart that came from his deep humanity.

How did the disciples respond to Jesus? When Jesus shared his heart with them, they were moved to participate willingly. So they answered, **“But where in this remote place can anyone get enough bread to feed them?”** (4) They were not rebellious, but cooperative. They began to be concerned about hungry people. But practically speaking, there was little they could do. It was a remote place, and there were thousands of hungry people there. Jesus wanted them to learn how to overcome impossible situations. He asked them, **“How many loaves do you have?”** (5) Jesus’ question turned their minds away from impossibility and toward possibility. They could begin to think

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about what they had to offer Jesus. So they brought seven loaves, which was most likely their own dinner. Jesus took them and gave thanks to God. He must have been thankful for the disciples’ growing faith. Jesus blessed the loaves and some fish as well, and fed four thousand people through his disciples (6-7). The people all ate and were satisfied (8). God’s blessing was overflowing; there were even seven basketfuls of leftovers (8). When Jesus fed the five thousand, the disciples were rather passive in their participation. But this time they were more active. They were growing as Jesus’ coworkers. There is no mention that they were tired after this event. They must have been full of joy and spirit. Jesus sent the crowd away and got into a boat with them and went to the region of Dalmanutha, Galilee (9-10). Jesus’ compassionate heart produced a miracle. These days also, Jesus really wants to feed hungry people out of his great compassion. Jesus wants us to know his heart and bring what we have to him. Many of us have been visiting campuses in this fall semester to share the gospel and offer Bible study to students. We have found that Jesus is working mightily, accepting our small offerings. Some students have confessed Jesus as their Savior for the first time. Others have come out of the darkness through Bible study and are walking in the light. Let’s remember that Jesus has compassion on people and is working through us as we offer our time and energy to him.

Second, Jesus helped his disciples escape the bad influence of ungodly leaders and grow to be like him (11-21). As soon as Jesus set his feet upon the soil of Galilee, all of a sudden, the Pharisees appeared. They had not come to welcome Jesus after a successful ministry in Gentile territory. Instead, they came to test him, asking for a sign from heaven (11). Though they saw and heard about many miracles that Jesus had done, why did they ask for a sign from heaven? The works Jesus performed testified that Jesus is the Messiah, sent by God (Jn 5:36; 14:11). Jesus demonstrated his authority on earth to forgive sins by healing a paralytic (2:10-11). Though they saw the miracle with their own eyes, they refused to believe. They were irrational and suppressed the truth (3:22). They were proud, self-righteous enemies of God. Their hearts were hardened because of deliberate unbelief. Jesus was very sorry. So he sighed deeply and said, **“Why does this generation ask for a sign? Truly I tell you, no sign will be given to it”** (12). In using the word “generation” Jesus indicated that the entire society had been led astray by the bad influence of the religious leaders. In Matthew’s gospel, Jesus calls it “a wicked and adulterous generation” (Mt 16:4). Jesus didn’t give them any sign.

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Then, and now, those who demand signs reveal their pride and unbelief, and become God’s enemies (1 Cor 1:21-22). Jesus left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side (13).

Jesus and his disciples departed so quickly that they forgot to bring bread with them. They had only one loaf in the boat. Maybe it was Matthew’s secret food supply, perhaps his “pocket food.” It would not go far among twelve hungry disciples. So they might have worried about dinner. At this moment, Jesus said, **“Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod.”** After discussing it among themselves, the disciples concluded it was because they had no bread (16). When they heard the word “yeast,” they automatically thought of bread. Those who have a money problem relate everything to money. Those who need to marry relate everything to marriage. We can understand the disciples’ situation. They had no income source and it was always a question where their next meal would come from. They were familiar with hungry feelings. They became grumpy and began to blame each other for not bringing bread. Someone might have blamed John, the youngest, who should have had the sense to bring bread for them all. They totally missed Jesus’ point.

What did Jesus really want his disciples to watch out for? In using the word “yeast,” Jesus was referring to bad influence. Yeast is a very small ingredient in baking bread. But it spreads to the whole loaf, causing it all to rise. In the same way, a small amount of bad influence can corrupt an entire church body. Apostle Paul warned the Corinthians, in regards to sexual immorality and pride, **“Don’t you know that a little yeast leavens the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast...”** (1 Cor 5:6b-7a). Then how were the Pharisees and Herod a bad influence? They were the religious and political leaders of their time. Leaders, intentionally or unintentionally give influence to their people. So leaders must be very careful about their words and actions, and especially about their hearts, for the heart is the wellspring of life; everything we say and do comes from the heart (Pr 4:23). If a leader’s heart is right with God, their words and actions will be a blessing to others. If their heart is far from God, they become hypocrites and a bad influence that corrupts people. Ultimately, they are accountable to God. The yeast of the Pharisees that Jesus mentioned is pride and self-righteousness which comes from unbelief. They were passionate to keep the traditions of the elders, which were based on the law of Moses, but they missed the spirit of the law—

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which is justice, mercy and faithfulness (Mt 23:23). They became very legalistic and were quick to judge others. They did not love or show mercy to the needy. Though they had great zeal for God, they did not know God’s righteousness, which is Jesus Christ, and sought to establish their own (Ro 10:2-3). Their hearts were far from God. So they became enemies of God. If we don’t know God’s heart, we can easily become like the Pharisees. We should always watch out for the yeast of pride and self-righteousness which comes from unbelief. The yeast of Herod refers to an immoral and pleasure-seeking lifestyle. Herod took his brother’s wife and killed a righteous man. Immorality led to violent injustice. Immorality and idol worship are closely related. Historically, Baal worship and Greco-Roman temple worship included prostitution in their major rituals. Today people don’t follow these kinds of practices, but their idolatry is essentially the same. So Tim Keller named the modern idols as sex, money and power. Since we all have sinful desires, we are susceptible to the influences of a pleasure-seeking life, such as pornography. We should watch out for these.

Aware of their discussion, Jesus was very sorry that they had no spiritual sense about his warning. They were slow to grow, and still very dull spiritually. It would be easy for Jesus to become upset and blow up at them. At such times, people often exaggerate by saying, “You always...You never...You are useless!” But Jesus did not exaggerate like that in rebuking his disciples. Rather, Jesus helped them to understand the meaning of his miracles based on the facts. To do so, Jesus prodded them with eight consecutive questions: **“Why are you talking about having no bread? Do you still not see or understand? Are your hearts hardened? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don’t you remember? 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?”** Why did Jesus want them to remember how many basketfuls of pieces were left over? It would help them to know who he is. Jesus had demonstrated his compassionate heart and his power to provide everything for the needy people. In fact, Jesus revealed that he is the Messiah, the Son of God. When they remembered the facts, they could remember what God had done and then apply their faith to the present situation. Then they could grow to be like Jesus. When we read the Old Testament, the words, **“I**

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am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of slavery,” are repeated many times. God really wanted his people to remember his grace of deliverance and to be thankful and to maintain their identity as God’s people. St. Paul always remembered what Jesus had done for him and said, **“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst”** (1 Ti 1:15). Each one of us has received the saving grace of Jesus. We have also experienced that God answered our prayer when we were in times of crisis. At the same time, God called each of us into this community and has been working among us and through us. Especially, God helped us to reach out to wandering college students with the gospel, and has raised disciples of Jesus. God has worked mightily in us, through us, and among us for nearly 40 years. God is the God of history. God identified himself as the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob (Ex 3:15). God wants us to remember what he has done, so that we may realize that he is living today, and working just as he did in the past. Let’s remember what God has done for each of us and for our community. When we remember God’s saving grace, we can be thankful and grow spiritually as influential men and women of God.

Third, Jesus planted hope in his disciples by healing a blind man (22-26).

When Jesus rebuked his disciples, they probably felt useless. Jesus knew that they needed encouragement. They came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him (22). Usually Jesus healed needy people immediately out of his compassion. But this time Jesus healed the blind man progressively, thinking about his disciples. Jesus took him by the hand and led him outside the village (23a). Jesus spit on the man’s eyes and put his hands on him and asked, **“Do you see anything?” (23b) The man looked up and said, “I see people; they look like trees walking around”** (24). When Jesus’ disciples heard this they felt, “Oh, that sounds like me. I have eyes but fail to see.” They might have felt that Jesus looked like a tree. Once more Jesus put his hands on the man’s eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly (25). Jesus sent him home, saying, **“Don’t even go into the village”** (26).

Through this event, Jesus revealed that he is the Messiah, who can open the eyes of the blind as prophesied by Isaiah (Isa 35:5). Though Jesus had revealed himself as the Messiah, the Son of God, in many ways, it was not easy for his disciples to realize. Actually, no one can understand who Jesus is

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without God’s help. We need the Spirit of wisdom and revelation. That is why Paul wrote to the Ephesians, **“I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better”** (Eph 1:17). Even though we are slow to grow and slow to understand, Jesus never dismisses us as his disciples. He still has hope for each of us to know who he is and to grow to be like him. When our Bible students seem dull and slow to grow, it is not easy to have hope for them. But if we lose hope for them in our hearts, they sense it and they lose hope for themselves. As Jesus never dismisses us as his disciples, having hope for us, so we should have hope for our Bible students regardless of their spiritual condition or situation. St. Paul said that love always hopes (1 Cor 13:7). Part of loving our Bible students is to have hope for them. When we practice this we can also grow in knowing Jesus’ heart. Let’s remember the saving grace of Jesus and overcome the bad influences in the world and grow to be shepherds like Jesus and give good influence to the people around us. Let’s have hope for our Bible students, as God has hope for us.