

DON'T YOU REMEMBER?

Matthew 16:1-12

Key Verse: 16:9

“Do you still not understand? Don’t you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered?”

In this passage Jesus again confronts the Jewish religious leaders who are bent on destroying him. Jesus exposes their deliberate unbelief and irrational state of mind. In their wickedness, they were really a bad influence. Jesus teaches his disciples how to overcome their bad influence. They must remember what Jesus has done. We must not succumb to bad influence. We must remember what Jesus has done.

First, don’t demand a sign; be a sign (1-4).

This event takes place in the vicinity of Magadan (15:39). This was on the west side of the Sea of Galilee, back in Jewish territory. No sooner had Jesus arrived there, than he was accosted by Jewish religious leaders. Look at verse 1. “The Pharisees and Sadducees came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven.” The Pharisees were strict adherents to the Law, including the prophets and the oral traditions. They believed in the resurrection and the spiritual world. The Sadducees acknowledged only the Pentateuch, and denied the resurrection and the spiritual world. These two groups were usually enemies of one another (Ac 26:6 ff.). But they came together against Jesus, their enemy. They represented the leadership of Israel.

They came to “test” Jesus. This was not an objective test which Jesus could pass by giving a right response. They had already officially discredited Jesus’ ministry. They came to intimidate Jesus and to draw him into their political scheme. In doing this, they totally ignored the truth. Jesus had done among them what no one else could do. Jesus made the lame walk, gave sight to the blind, and raised the dead. This is precisely what the Scriptures foretold the Messiah would do. The Jewish leaders were not interested in the facts or in the fulfillment of Scriptures. They only looked for a way to get rid of Jesus. Their fierce opposition could intimidate anyone. How did Jesus respond?

Jesus was insightful, reasonable and penetrating. Look at verses 2-3. “He replied, ‘When evening comes, you say, “It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,” and in the morning, “Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.” You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times.” Jesus exposed their hypocrisy so clearly. They were good at interpreting the appearance of the sky. They knew when it was going to rain and made sure to bring their umbrellas so they would not ruin their expensive garments. Clearly, they had the necessary faculties to interpret the signs of the times. But they could not do this. They were completely ignorant of spiritual reality. They were so ignorant that they had called the Messiah a demon possessed man. How did they become so stupid spiritually?

Look at verse 4a. “A wicked and adulterous generation looks for a miraculous sign, but none will be given it except the sign of Jonah.” Jesus called them wicked and adulterous. Wicked and adulterous people must repent, not ask for a miraculous sign. When they did not repent their obvious sin before God they became spiritually blind, deaf and dumb. Spiritual insight does not originate from great human ability. Spiritual insight comes to those who repent their sins. The problem of wicked and adulterous people is that they don’t repent their sins. They suppress the truth and deny that they are sinning. Proverbs 30:20 says, “This is the way of an adulteress: She eats and wipes her mouth and says, ‘I’ve done nothing wrong.’” This is precisely the attitude of wicked and adulterous people. They claim to be without sin, thinking no one knows their deeds of darkness. However, their sin has tangible and deadly consequences to their own souls and to all of their relationships.

Some men indulge in pornography secretly, thinking that if no one knows what they are doing, no harm is done. But the wages of sin is death (Ro 6:23). Their souls wither. They lose spiritual sense and their humanity. Then they break relationships with their wives and children, and most of all with God. They often do this unintentionally, as those in a state of spiritual stupor. Though the religious leaders sinned a lot, they came and stood before Jesus as if they were holy. They demanded a miraculous sign as though they were the unique moral and spiritual guardians of the nation. But in truth, they were irrational, extremely wicked and hypocritical. They are like a man who eats high calorie food in secret and never exercises. Then when he gets on the scales and sees the result, he exclaims, “How can that be? I did all the right things.” They are like a woman who secretly enjoys using her credit card. Then when

the statement comes showing the increased balance, she says, "This must be a mistake, maybe identity theft." They are like a person who watches television all day and does not study. Then when a poor report card comes they say, "It's my teacher's fault. He is unfair and biased." When sin is exposed, it is time to repent. Instead, wicked people make excuses, blame others, and seek miraculous signs. They want God to fix their problem miraculously even though they do not confess their sins. They hope that they will suddenly get straight A's, have an attractive body, and a healthy bank account. Many come to God demanding a miracle when they really need to just repent of their sins.

Jesus refused to give the religious leaders any sign except the sign of Jonah. The sign of Jonah is Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection (Mt 12:40). Jesus' resurrection proved with power that he is the Son of God (Ro 1:4). The power of Jesus' resurrection is truly great. Jesus' disciples, who had been fearful, became as bold as Jesus after meeting Risen Christ. They rebuked the religious leaders of Israel and the whole nation, challenging people to repent. Many believed in Jesus and experienced the work of the Holy Spirit. They became living signs, down through the generations, that Christ is risen and he is the Son of God.

Hosea Lee came to America as a missionary. But in the beginning his faith was weak. He fell into culture shock and became helpless. He could not gain the respect of his wife who was "made in the USA." But through deep Bible study, he met the Risen Christ, the Son of God. He was completely changed. For the last several years he has supported his family fully, taught the Bible to five students per week, and studied in graduate school at Northwestern. Last week he received his master's degree in computer science in a glorious graduation ceremony. He also received a significant promotion at work, and has become a fellowship leader. Now he has the deep and sincere respect of his noble wife, Annie. Who can change human beings like this? Only the Risen Christ, the Son of God. Those who repent their sins and accept the Risen Christ all become changed people, and signs of his glory and power. Let's not demand miraculous signs from Jesus, hiding our wickedness. Instead, let's repent our sins and accept the Risen Christ, who can make us a sign for our generation.

The last part of verse 4 says, "Jesus then left them and went away." In the gospels, it is very unusual for Jesus to leave someone like this. Usually, Jesus blesses people and sends them away. But here, Jesus turned away from the religious leaders and left them. They were too wicked to receive his words. They were determined to live in deceit and to oppose Jesus. Even Jesus could not help them anymore. Now Jesus had to protect his disciples.

Second, Jesus helps his disciples to have healthy faith (5-10).

The confrontation between Jesus and the religious leaders was hostile indeed. The disciples were probably in a hurry to cross the lake and get out of there (5). In their haste, they forgot to bring bread. The disciples never forgot to bring bread. This shows that they were in a spiritual quandary, flustered by the pressure of the religious leaders. Jesus said to them, "Be careful. Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (6). Jesus wanted them to resist the insipid influence of the religious leaders. But they did not understand. So they had a disciples' conference to discuss it. They concluded that Jesus was unhappy because they forgot to bring bread. They had fallen into self-condemnation. They worried that they would have nothing to eat. When their stomachs began to growl, fatalism and anxiety overwhelmed them. They forgot who they were and what they were doing. They felt cut off from Jesus and useless. The devil's attack is so sneaky. It can come suddenly through the bad influence of others. It is disarming and paralyzes its victim, like the strike of a tiger's paw.

Look at verse 8. "Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, 'You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread?'" Jesus called them, "You of little faith." It is the fourth time in this gospel (6:30; 8:26; 14:31). It seems to be their nickname. But in fact, Jesus was training them to be men of faith. Jesus helped them to see their problem as a faith problem. It was not a bread problem or a storm problem, but a faith problem. What they needed was faith in Jesus. Jesus wanted them to have healthy faith that would not waver in danger or difficulty. Jesus' disciples would be the leaders of world salvation work. It was essential that they be men of healthy faith. They must trust in Jesus no matter what happened. They must maintain their love relationship with Jesus in any situation. However, they had been talking among themselves without Jesus. They had been separated from Jesus by the subtle attack of the devil through the religious leaders. Jesus rebuked them to bring them back to their senses. The Bible says that nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. We must believe the love of God in any situation. What really matters is the condition of our faith, not the problem we are facing.

Look at verse 9. “Do you still not understand?” When the disciples became shaky in faith, they could not understand Jesus spiritually. They interpreted Jesus’ words with human reason and subjective emotions and totally misunderstood. In contrast, the Canaanite woman could understand Jesus’ words because she never lost faith in Jesus.

Jesus’ rebuke to his disciples was not only to expose their problem, it was also therapeutic. Jesus wanted to heal their faith and restore their spirits. Look at verses 9b-10. “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?” Jesus said, “Don’t you remember?” Then Jesus reminded them of two specific events that revealed his power, love and provision: the feeding of the five thousand and the feeding of the four thousand. Jesus was jarring their minds to remember what he had done. Jesus wants us to approach challenges by remembering what he has already done based on his promises. We call this “having a sense of God’s history.” Having a sense of history makes a person see things differently. Last month, after the WMR 2006 and the Missionary Conference, Korean UBF coworkers brought us to the DMZ, the war zone separating North and South. We visited a deep underground tunnel built by the North for a surprise attack. We were actually able to walk down into the tunnel for 350 meters and see much of it. At the time, I was full of joy over the work of God and glad to be get some exercise. I felt good. Then a Korean shepherd said, “I feel the terrible reality of war.” This really struck me. I wondered how I would feel to visit New York where the Twin Towers had fallen. Suddenly the pain of war became real and I felt the wounds in many hearts. I sincerely prayed for the unification of North and South. A sense of history made the difference.

Likewise, Jesus wants his disciples to see everything with a sense of God’s history, remembering what Jesus has done based on God’s promises. Then we can understand things from God’s point of view. We can taste Jesus’ love and be full of faith. Jesus who loved us in our wretched state of sin will continue to do so. Jesus who provided for our needs will continue to do so. Hebrews 13:8 says, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.” When we remember what Jesus has done, we can overcome the devil’s attack and have peace. Then we can learn from Jesus all the more.

The boy David had a sense of God’s history. The Philistine army and the giant Goliath were threatening Israel. Goliath was nine feet tall and had weapons of mass destruction. Before him the whole nation trembled and no one wanted to fight him. But David saw things differently. To the boy David, Goliath was merely an uncircumcised Philistine, an animal man. On the other hand, the holy God was with his people Israel. They were not helpless, they were the army of the living God. The boy David also remembered God’s deliverance in his personal life. He said, “The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine” (1Sa 17:37). David was filled with courage. He ran out to his enemy, threw his stone into his forehead and killed him with one blow.

Now we are preparing the Midwest Region Summer Bible conference. It is a spiritual battle against the devil and the power of sin and death. It is God’s work, a part of God’s redemptive history. As we approach this conference, it is most important to remember what God has done for us and to put our trust in God to work mightily again. God blessed the 2003 Midwest Region Summer Bible Conference abundantly. Surely, God will bless this conference as well. What we need most is to have healthy faith based on a sense of God’s history.

The problem is that we are so forgetful. Though Jesus has done 1,000 things for us, we easily forget them all, only remembering one mistake we made, or one act of the devil, and become distressed. We must remember what Jesus has done. 2 Timothy 2:8 says, “Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel....” May God help each of us remember Jesus Christ who died for us and rose again. May the Holy Spirit help each of us remember what he has done in our personal lives, our community, and our nation.

Third, guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees (11-12).

Look at verses 11-12. “‘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.” After being rebuked, the disciples got much better. Their faith was restored and their hearts were healed. They began to understand what Jesus was teaching them. They needed to have healthy faith that was free from the yeast of the religious leaders. Hebrews 11:1 says, “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” Healthy faith

is 100% certain about God's love, power and goodness. It does not contain even 1% of doubt, fear, or anxiety. To have this kind of healthy faith, we must watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees. What is this yeast? In the context of this passage it is the poisonous influence of those who hate Jesus and want to destroy his work.

These days there are people who want to destroy the work of Jesus. They are instruments of the same devil that attacked Jesus and his work some 2,000 years ago. They are irrational, malicious and wicked. They invent slanderous accusations that plant doubt in young believer's hearts. They use the internet, mass mailings, and any available means. We must take Jesus' warning about them seriously. We must be on our guard against their evil influence. Jesus did not leave his disciples with such people. Jesus took them to Gentile territory to have time of Bible study until they confessed their faith in him. We must be on our guard against the yeast of wicked people in our times.

Before finishing this study, let's think about one young lady who has healthy faith. She is Missionary Susan Hong Jr. who is on a short-term mission to Sri-Lanka. At this present time, it is very difficult to get any kind of visa in Sri-Lanka. If someone spends a lot of time, pays a lot of money, and talks to many people, he may be able to get a two month tourist visa. Susan knew this. But she went to the visa interview by faith. She held on to the Daily Bread passage which described how Esther went to the king by faith, and after fasting prayer. Susan decided to pray and act like Esther did. She went into the office. Within two minutes, she was given a six month visa at a very low cost. The coworkers in Sri-Lanka, who know the situation well, were shocked. Missionary Barnabas Baek claimed that God had given the golden scepter to Susan. When we have healthy faith, nothing is impossible for us. When we have healthy faith we can experience the mighty power of God to prepare our summer Bible conference well.

In this passage we heard Jesus' voice, "Don't you remember...?" Let's remember the suffering, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ for our sins. Let's remember the love of God for us who sent Jesus to die for us while we were still sinners. Let's ask the Holy Spirit to purge our hearts from the bad influence of Jesus' enemies so that we may have healthy faith that pleases Jesus.