“DON’T YOU REMEMBER?”

Matthew 15:29–16:12

Key Verses: 16:9,10

“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?”

“Do you remember when…?” Remembering the past isn’t just sentimental reminiscing. Remembering is a crucial part of learning. It’s why when we’re in a class we’re expected to remember the book we read or what the teacher explained. Sometimes we need important things repeated to us until we grasp them. In today’s passage Jesus repeats a miracle, feeding a large crowd of people with just a few loaves. Then, he reminds his disciples of both feedings. Though he’s ministering to crowds, he’s focused on his disciples. What did Jesus want them to learn from this repetition? What does he want us to learn? May God open our hearts and speak to us personally through his word today.

Look at 15:29. Jesus leaves the region of Tyre and Sidon, up in the northwest, and comes back down to the Sea of Galilee. He goes up a mountainside and sits down. Later, it’s described as a “remote place” (33). What happens? Look at verse 30. This is a brief summary. It reminds us of what’s been happening in Jesus’ ministry all along. Crowds would show up with all kinds of sick people, and whenever they came, Jesus healed them (4:24; 8:16; 12:15; 14:14,36; 19:2). The sick were brought to Jesus’ feet, for his full attention. This one verse again shows us that Jesus loves sick people, people with all kinds of problems, people no one else wants. And how do people respond? Read verse 31. Though they happened repeatedly, Jesus’ healings were still amazing. Mute people could speak! Crippled people were made well! Lame people could walk! Blind people could see! They weren’t just random; these were very specific healings that the Old Testament prophet Isaiah predicted the Messiah would one day do (Isa35:5,6; Mt11:5). People were praising God, not only because Jesus’ healings were so great, but because they were a sign that God had kept his promises and finally had sent the Messiah, the Savior King, for his people.

Read verse 32. What did Jesus mean here? He’s trying to get his disciples to understand him. There are several important things in his words. First, he plainly mentions his compassion. His heart was broken for these people. Not only had they been suffering from all kinds of sicknesses, but now they had been with him, we notice, for three whole days, and they’ve had nothing to eat. It’s another amazing detail. How could these people stay there with Jesus for three whole days, eating nothing? Maybe it took that long for Jesus to personally minister to each sick person, and nobody wanted to miss out, so they all just stayed, patiently enduring the hunger. Maybe Jesus had been teaching them during those three days, too. In any case, Jesus was so wonderful that no one was complaining about their hunger. We also notice here how mindful Jesus is. He appreciated the intensity of these people’s hunger. He knew they were so hungry now that if they tried to travel home, they might faint from hunger on the way. But why is he saying this to his disciples? He’s saying something not directly, but indirectly. In one sense, he’s saying he wants his disciples to learn his compassion—he wants them to have a compassion that’s *this* passionate, *this* empathetic, *this* understanding. In another sense, he’s dropping his disciples a big hint: he wants to feed this crowd, and he wants *them* to help him.

This should have come as no surprise, because Jesus had already asked them to do this not long before, back in chapter 14. It was a very similar situation—a large, hungry crowd of many thousands, and they had only few loaves and fish. But Jesus was able to do a miracle with it and feed everybody. Jesus wanted his disciples to remember that when they brought what they had to him, even though it was an impossible situation, he could use it to meet everyone’s need. Why was Jesus repeating this lesson? It was a lesson his disciples really needed to learn, because it was what they would continue to do in the future, after he was gone. They would always have very little means, and people’s needs would always be very great, and they would need to care for them. Jesus wanted them to be sure that he’s always able to meet all people’s needs. Paul learned this lesson and taught all believers: “And my God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus” (Php4:19).

What do the disciples say? Read verse 33. They don’t object to his compassion; they just don’t see how they can do it in that situation. Obviously they haven’t learned the lesson yet. Honestly, we’re so much like them. So often we look at our situation and think, “I just can’t.” Not only do we feel overwhelmed by our own life’s demands, problems and limitations, but also we feel so inadequate to help anybody else.

How does Jesus respond? He could have gotten frustrated and said, “Haven’t you learned yet? Do I have to keep repeating myself?” But he didn’t. What did he say? Look at verse 34a. He says, “How many loaves do you have?” Jesus is so gentle and humble in heart, and so patient. He’s also such a good teacher. He knows they need this lesson repeated. And he doesn’t just teach them theory; he helps them to actually experience it, again. Look at verse 34b. This time they have a very similar small amount.

What happens? Read verses 35–38. It is almost exactly the same as when Jesus fed the 5,000. He gives thanks for the little they did have, and prays to God. Then God performs a miracle. And again, the disciples’ participation and co-working is key. They’re not just observers or spectators; they receive from Jesus, then give what they receive to the people. When it’s over, they pick up leftovers, showing that what Jesus provided was more than enough for everybody. Previously, it was twelve basketfuls; this time, it’s seven—probably symbolizing that Jesus is able to provide for the whole world. By repeating this lesson, Jesus wanted his disciples to realize the importance of it. Afterwards, Jesus left to the western shore of the sea (39).

Look at 16:1. The Pharisees and Sadducees were the religious leaders of the day. They were like opposing political parties, but in attacking Jesus they get together. They’re asking Jesus for a miracle on demand. It says “from heaven.” Many think this means they wanted Jesus to show them some miracle in the sky. Maybe they thought it would be a more certain miracle to prove who he was.

How does Jesus respond? Read verses 2–4. Jesus rebukes them for being so sensitive to the weather forecast, but so blind to what God had already done through him. Jesus had already performed so many signs to prove that the kingdom of God had come near. Jesus mentions “the sign of Jonah.” He already mentioned it earlier, in chapter 12. At that time, the Pharisees and teachers of the law had come to Jesus asking for a sign. Jesus said, “A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth” (12:39,40). Just as Jonah was vomited out of the fish, so Jesus would be raised from the dead. This is the only miracle Jesus said we really need to believe in him—his death and resurrection.

What happened next? Read verses 5–7. Here we see that Jesus and his disciples are on completely different wavelengths. Jesus is concerned about the Pharisees and Sadducees, but the disciples are concerned about not having food. Sound familiar? How often do we get so concerned about our immediate needs that we can’t understand what God may be trying to tell us?

How did Jesus help them? Read verses 8–11. The first thing we notice here is that Jesus calls them “you of little faith.” He told them this earlier, when he taught them not to worry (6:30). He said it to them again, when they were caught in a storm (8:26). He said it to Peter, when he started looking at the waves instead of looking at Jesus and started to sink (14:31). Clearly, one of the main points of Jesus’ training was to help his disciples grow in faith. What is faith? Faith isn’t head-knowledge about God; faith is practical. Faith is responding to real life hardships by trusting in God. Jesus was praying for his disciples to grow as men of real faith, even as small as a mustard seed (17:20). We learn from this that it takes time to learn authentic faith. It takes repeated lessons, patience and prayer, and repeated challenges. This time, the disciples became unbelieving when they forgot to bring bread for their journey.

How did Jesus help their faith? Read verses 9,10 again. They could grow in faith when they remembered what God had done in the past. God who helped them in the past to feed huge crowds of people, with many leftovers, can help them right now. Again, Jesus is such a great teacher. He patiently reminds them of the repeated lesson they had learned, and he asks them to think about it, remember the lesson, that God provides, and apply it to their current situation.

But then he gets back to the point he’s trying to make. Read verses 11,12. Why is Jesus referring to their teaching as “yeast”? Yeast is a metaphor for bad influence. It takes just a tiny bit to influence many people. The bad influence of the Pharisees and Sadducees is to keep demanding miraculous signs in order to believe. Like yeast, it represents pride. To keep asking God if he’s there and will care for us is pride. Once God reveals himself to us, and we get to know him, we need no further proof—we just need to trust him.

The Bible repeatedly tells us to remember the great things God has done (e.g. 1Sa12:24; Ps106:21; 126:2,3). The whole book of Deuteronomy is basically a book teaching God’s people to remember all the great things he has done. We live in a generation with a very short attention span. People live in the moment, not caring about the past or the future. But when we forget the lessons of the past, we’re doomed to keep making the same mistakes. It tells us that Christian faith is historical, meaning rooted in history, remembering God and what he’s done in history. As we reflect on all that God has done, we’re humbled by his greatness, power and love. Our current problems, which may seem so big, shrink in comparison. Our hearts are strengthened in faith to face any problem around us. Especially, in light of today’s passage, we need to remember Jesus. Jesus is our compassionate shepherd and healer. Jesus is able to meet all our needs. Jesus is the fulfillment of all God’s promises. Jesus is our Savior King, and the Savior of the whole world. Today in some churches it’s popular to seek miracles. But Jesus wants us not to seek miracles, but to know him with certainty, through the miracles he’s already done.

Today Jesus is asking us, “Don’t you remember?” May God help us remember Jesus, his great compassion and his power to meet all our needs in any situation. May God help us to grow as men and women of faith who can carry on Jesus’ work in our times.