

Don't You Remember? (A History Lesson)

Mark 8:1-21

Key Verse: 8:18b

by Moses Lenthang

In today's passage Jesus feeds 4000 people. There seems to be no difference between this event and the event of Jesus feeding the 5000, except the difference of number. However in today's passage Jesus teaches us one important truth; it is a History Lesson. What is History? A simple definition of history is remembering the past. These days history is not a popular subject. Those who major in history have a hard time to get a job. But a sense of history is crucially important. To be a child of God, a sense of God's history is an absolute requirement. One major difference between man and animals is that man has a sense of history, but animals do not. May we listen to this history lesson and remember who Jesus is and what he has done throughout our life time.

First, Jesus' endless compassion (1-3). Today's passage begins by saying, "During those days..." Those days refers to Jesus' healing ministry in Gentile territory. Jesus visited many towns, villages and countrysides and healed all kinds of sick people. Our Lord Jesus was so compassionate that he could not pass by sick people without healing them, even in the Gentile territories. During those days another large crowd of people gathered around Jesus. Jesus had helped these people again and again. When Jesus fed the 5000, they tasted and enjoyed the delicious food. They came back again with bigger expectations and greater demands. Actually no one could meet their ever-increasing demands. How did Jesus look at them? Look at verses 2-3. "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." Here we learn two things about Jesus' compassion.

Firstly, Jesus saw them with the heart of God. Usually people want to talk with nice, handsome and gorgeous people. On the other hand, fallen men look down upon those who look lowly like rookies or freshmen. Man's happiness largely depends on how he sees others. When we see others with the heart of God, we are really happy. But when we see others with a critical mind we become miserable. The crowds that came to Jesus were endlessly burdensome and demanding. But Jesus saw them with the heart of God. He saw them as the precious children of God created in the holy image of God.

Secondly, out of his compassion Jesus gave them spiritual food. Many people help poor people with physical food and finally spoil them or make them become like beggars. However, Jesus did not give them only physical food. Jesus gave them the word of God as the fundamental solution to their life problem. Jesus knew that these crowds of people were seemingly lowly and useless people. They did not seem to need the word of God. But Jesus believed that if they studied the Bible, they would be all right. Jesus believed that if the word of God is planted in a person, even a rookie-like person can be changed into a faithful, responsible person.

Jesus told his disciples about his compassion for the hungry and tired crowd. 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?’” This shows that the disciples had made a little progress since the time Jesus fed the 5000. When Jesus fed the 5000, Jesus’ disciples were so impatient that they asked Jesus to dismiss the crowd. However, this time they waited for three full days without saying anything. Before, the disciples had no compassion for the hungry crowd. They rationalized that they had no money and made many excuses to send them away. This time they were concerned together with Jesus and wondered where they could get bread to feed the people.

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.

Second, Jesus worked together with his disciples (5-9a). Jesus knew that his disciples had no resources to feed the 4000. But Jesus treated the 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 point of co-working. 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 4000 people 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 4000 hungry people. They not only fed them. They also picked up seven basketfuls of leftovers. Those who came to Jesus were fully satisfied. God’s blessing overflowed. What a great blessing it is to work together with Jesus. Everybody knows the importance of co-working, but it is not easy at all for sinful people to work together. Jesus is God himself. He did not have to work with sinful people. Even though his disciples looked too young to work with Jesus, Jesus respected them as his co-workers. He let his disciples participate in feeding the 4000. God’s work can be done when we work together. Still, Jesus’ heart is to feed the whole world through us. Our SBC preparation is the best time to work together with our fellowship members and young Bible students. When we pray and work with Jesus, God will bless

us and he will use us to feed many hungry souls. May God help us to work together by faith and with assurance of God's abundant, overflowing blessing.

Third, Jesus taught them a history lesson (9b-21). Look at verses 9b-10. "And having 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. (11) They had already seen and heard so many miracles performed by Jesus, but they asked Jesus to perform a sign from heaven anyway. They denied the factual evidence of all they had already seen and heard. They were spiritually blind and deaf.

What did Jesus say to them? Look at 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 knew that they came to discredit and destroy his ministry. 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 left over bread they had forgotten to bring. The disciples had just eaten with the 4000 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.

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." What was Jesus warning them to watch out for? As we know, yeast is so small it is nearly invisible, but once put into dough, it influences the whole batch. The Pharisees and Herod looked very different since Pharisees were religious leaders and Herod was a political leader. But one thing in common was their resistance to Jesus. Their unbelief and miracle-seeking mentality could plant doubt and fear in the hearts of young believers. So Jesus warned his disciples to watch out for their bad influence. How did Jesus' 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?'" Jesus rebuked his disciples for worrying too much about bread, for not seeing or understanding, and for their hardened hearts. Jesus had already performed so many miracles. What were they? Jesus drove the demon out of a man in the synagogue. Jesus healed many with various diseases and drove out many demons. Jesus healed a man with leprosy and a paralytic. Jesus calmed a stormy Sea. Jesus healed a Gerasene demoniac and a bleeding woman. Jesus raised Jairus' daughter from the dead. Jesus fed the 5000 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 4000 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. In short, they should have had faith in Almighty God. 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 they did not remember what Jesus had already done. The disciples should have found the spiritual meaning of Jesus' miracles and had it permanently imprinted on their minds and hearts. But they completely forgot and only saw what was before them at the present.

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. University professors try to help their students or TA's to make progress and reach their goals. But when the advisor loses hope for them, he dismisses them any time. But Jesus was 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. We call this a sense of God's history.

What is a sense of God's history? It is to remember the work of God which Jesus has accomplished. It is to remember what God has done in us and through us. It is to learn the heart, spirit and principle of Jesus and apply it in a new setting to create a new history. At the beginning the disciples had no sense of God's history, but later they learned from Jesus. During the first century the disciples were under fiery persecutions. But they learned Jesus' heart, spirit and principles in doing God's work. As a result, they challenged adversities and preached the gospel and created a new history for world salvation.

When we review Christian history, God has used so preciously those who had a sense of God's history. One of the best examples is the apostle Paul. Before he came to know Jesus, Paul wanted to destroy all Christians out of selfish ambition and self-righteousness. But when he met the Risen Christ, his spiritual eyes were opened, realizing what a wretched sinner he was. He experienced the marvelous grace of Jesus who came to save a wretched sinner like him. As a result, he learned Jesus' grace and heart that he wanted no one to perish, but everyone to be saved. He always ran around with a sense of urgency in preaching the gospel everywhere, in any situation, to save dying souls like an emergency room physician. Paul learned Jesus' heart. He practiced Jesus' principles in preaching the gospel to the nations of the world. Thus, he helped to fulfill God's plan for world salvation.

One practical example around us is Pastor Ron Ward. When Pastor Ron Ward first came to Chicago, he did not know how to study the Bible well. But through working with Dr. Samuel Lee for 18 years he learned how to respect

the word of God. He learned how to follow the Bible passage carefully and prayerfully, putting aside his own ideas. As a result, today he became an independent servant of God's word. We have been so blessed through his Bible study. Ten years ago when I received message training, I had a humble learning mind that I could make progress. Each time I delivered a message at a conference, my wife commented that I was the best messenger. But these days I have been full of my own ideas and resisted training. I need to restore God's grace and a sense of God's history so I may make progress and grow as a great messenger of God's word.

From today's study we learn that anyone who has a sense of God's history makes progress and grows endlessly. He can be used preciously in God's work and history. There are so many problems nationally and globally. But one main problem is a lack of a sense of God's history. Those who have a sense of God's history can overcome any situation and live a victorious life. On the other hand, those who have no sense of God's history become habitual slaves of their present situation. The first step to learn a sense of God's history is to remember the grace of Jesus in our lives. God saved us from our terrible sins through the blood of Jesus. May we remember who Jesus is and what he has done and live by faith with assurance of God's blessing throughout our life time. May God restore a sense of God's history in each one of us and in the young people of our generation and make North America a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.