

“DON’T YOU REMEMBER?”

Matthew 15:29-16:12

Key Verse: 16:8-9

“Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, ‘You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? Do you still not understand? Don’t you remember the five loaves for the five thousand and how many basketfuls you gathered?’”

About five years ago a book was published with the title, “Monday Morning Atheist,” written by Doug Spada. In light of his own struggle, Mr. Spada surveyed 5,000 Christians and found they had a common problem. They had faith on Sundays, while attending worship service with their families. But on Mondays, they turned off the switch and worked as though they were atheists. Through his research, he found out why. They worried so much about job security that they chronically overworked and neglected their families, their health, and their spiritual life. They became slaves of their work. This reminds us of the disciples in today’s passage who worried about having no bread. This revealed their anxiety about future security. Without solving this problem, they could not grow as Jesus’ disciples. How did he help them? Jesus rebuked them: **“You of little faith.”** Then he helped them to have faith by remembering what he had done. The disciples’ problem is common to many of us. In reality, we have many challenging issues that consume our attention and make us fall into anxiety. It seems that we need to solve many practical problems. But the real problem is our lack of faith. Faith in Jesus is not just conceptual; it has power to give us victory in our practical lives. Let’s hear Jesus’ words, **“You of little faith,”** remember what Jesus has done, and renew our faith in him.

First, Jesus demonstrated his compassion by caring for many needy people (15:29-39). Jesus left the region of Tyre and Sidon and went along the Sea of Galilee. He went up on a mountainside and sat down (29). When people heard that Jesus had returned, great crowds came to him, bringing the lame, the blind, the crippled, the mute and many others (30). It seems that these people needed many kinds of specialists: orthopedists, optometrists, ENTs, ophthalmologists, audiologists, neurologists. They would also need time for examinations, various treatments, and rehabilitation. Perhaps it would take scores of doctors and nurses several months to heal some of them. But Jesus healed all of them immediately and completely with no mistakes or

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complications, and no medical bills. Those who had been lame and crippled were jumping around and praising God. Perhaps they formed a dance team. Those who had been blind were looking around at God’s beautiful creation, saying, “Wow! Amazing!” Then they saw their family members and hugged them joyfully. Those who had been mute were talking nonstop and formed a chorus to praise the Lord. It was a wonderful celebration of Jesus’ gracious works, full of joy, praise and thanksgiving. People were amazed at this and praised the God of Israel (31).

In verse 32, we can see that the crowd had been with Jesus for three days. Perhaps by this time, the food they brought was gone and they were hungry and tired. His disciples might have expected that the healing ministry was over and it was time to rest. They were exhausted, even watching Jesus work so hard. At that moment, 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. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way.”** Though Jesus had worked so hard to heal them all, he did not think his service was over. He was still concerned about them. He felt their hunger and wanted to feed them all without missing anyone. This is divine compassion. Our compassion is very limited. After caring for one person for several hours we may be exhausted. But Jesus’ compassion is unlimited; it is deeper than the ocean and higher than the mountains; it embraces all kinds of people with deep understanding.

Compassion is a most significant attribute of God. When God revealed himself to Moses, he said, **“The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin...”** (Ex 34:6b-7a). Though Jesus is the Almighty Creator God, he never used his power to force people to follow him. Rather, he used his power to help people in need. As we see in the gospels, compassion motivated Jesus to perform miracles. For example, when Jesus met a widow whose only son had just died, his heart went out to her and he said, **“Don’t cry.”** Then he raised the boy to life, saying, **“Young man, get up!”** And he gave him back to his mother (Lk 7:11-15). Compassion moved Jesus to take care of everyone who came to him one by one. This compassion ultimately led Jesus to the cross to suffer and die for us, bearing all our transgressions and iniquities. In one aspect, the cross is the symbol of God’s compassion for sinners. When Jesus

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endured the cross, scorning its shame, God raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in heaven. Now Jesus is the King of kings and Lord of lords. Though he is the Sovereign Ruler, he is still our compassionate high priest. Hebrews 4:15a says, **“For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses.”** This is why we can approach God’s throne of grace with confidence so that we may receive mercy and grace to help us in our time of need” (Heb 4:16).

Jesus’ disciples were moved by his compassion. Their exhaustion was driven out and their spirit was renewed by Jesus’ compassionate heart. But in reality, they did not know what to do. So, they answered, **“Where could we get enough bread in this remote place to feed such a crowd?”** (33) In verse 38 Matthew notes that there were four thousand men, besides women and children. They might need 8,000 Big Macs, fries and cokes, and another 4,000 happy meals to feed everyone. But there were no McDonalds nearby. Jesus asked, **“How many loaves do you have?”** Jesus wants us to figure out what we have and offer it to participate in his work. Though it may be small, Jesus wants us to be sacrificial. His disciples replied, **“Seven, and a few small fish”** (34). Jesus told the crowd to sit down on the ground (35). Then he took the seven loaves and the fish, and when he had given thanks, he broke them and gave them to the disciples, and they in turn to the people (36). God’s blessing overflowed. They all ate and were satisfied and seven basketfuls of broken pieces were left over (37). Jesus’ compassion had produced a miracle. In this way, Jesus revealed himself as the Almighty God who provides for human needs out of his compassion. Then Jesus sent the crowd away. He and his disciples got into a boat and went into the vicinity of Magadan (39).

When we compare this passage with the feeding of the five thousand, we find that Jesus progressively reveals his motive to his disciples. Why? He wanted them to share his compassion in doing God’s work. Motives are very important. God sees our motives. We may serve people with various motives. One is for personal success as a gospel worker, thinking that this validates our acceptance by God. Another motive may be to get human recognition. Still another may be to obtain something we desire, such as a marriage candidate or a job prospect. Some may simply seek a tax benefit. Jesus teaches us that our motive in helping others should be very pure. We should have the compassionate heart of Jesus. We should help people without expecting anything from them. Peter’s motive in serving God’s work was once to build

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up an earthly kingdom. But he learned Jesus' compassionate heart and was completely changed. He said, **“Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away”** (1Pe 5:2-4). When we serve others out of Jesus' compassion, we are not burdened at all, but very joyful. We can experience who Jesus is and grow to be like him. Let's pray that we may have the compassionate heart of Jesus.

Second, Jesus planted faith in his disciples’ hearts (16:1-12). Jesus and his disciples were in Magadan, a variant of “Magdala,” on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. This was Mary Magdalene’s hometown. As soon as Jesus’ feet touched Israelite soil, the Pharisees and Sadducees appeared. Pharisees were strict preservationists of orthodox Judaism. Sadducees were religious liberals and political allies with Rome. They denied that there is resurrection, spirits, or angels (Ac 23:8). Due to these differences, these two groups were enemies. However, both groups felt threatened by Jesus and were willing to collaborate to try to kill him. Together they came to Jesus and tested him by asking him to show them a sign from heaven (16:1). They demanded something from heaven, such as the movement of planets and stars. If Jesus gave them a sign from heaven, it might be lightning striking them all at once and burning them up. Jesus already showed them enough miracles. However, they deliberately rejected all the signs Jesus had performed before their eyes. They were suppressing the truth. Their purpose in asking for a sign was to trap Jesus and destroy him.

Jesus exposed their hypocrisy. They were very much concerned about the weather. When evening came, they said, “It will be fair weather, for the sky is red” (2). So, they planned picnics and barbecues. In the morning, they said, “Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.” So, they decided not to go outside, but stay inside and watch a movie. Even though they had no smart phone with a weather app, they still knew how to interpret the appearance of the sky because they were very concerned about their own wellbeing. But they could not interpret the signs of the times (3). It was because they were spiritually blind. They were too ignorant due to their self-interest to recognize Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus called them a wicked and

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adulterous generation (4). Such people should not ask for signs. They need to repent of their sins before the truth of God’s holy commands. The only sign Jesus showed them would be the sign of Jonah. Simply speaking, this referred to Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. This sign is the greatest proof that Jesus is the Son of God. Apostle Paul said in Romans 1:4, “**...and who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God with power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord.**”

Throughout the generations there have been many descendants of the Pharisees and Sadducees. Like the Pharisees, some are extreme legalists. We find them in Jesus’ time, Paul’s time, Luther’s time and our time. They infer that believing in Jesus is not enough; we must also keep Christian rules to be saved. They emphasize doing good works as the basis for salvation, not as the fruit of salvation. They are self-righteous and judgmental. There is no grace, mercy or compassion. They do not honor Jesus alone as our Savior and Lord, but magnify human effort. In this way they discredit what Jesus has done, especially his death and resurrection.

The Sadducees can represent liberal theologians who are practical atheists. Included among them are the pioneers of “higher criticism” or “historical criticism,” such as Friedrich Schleiermacher, David Strauss, and Ludwig Feuerbach, who were German Biblical scholars in the Tübingen School. Another, later figure, was Rudolf Bultmann. They tried to understand the Scripture based on the modern scientific mindset. They denied all the supernatural aspects of the Scripture, such as the incarnation, miracles, and especially the resurrection. On a positive note, they helped to develop a better understanding of the human aspect of Scripture. However, they undermined the divine inspiration and authority of Scripture. If we dissect and analyze a fish, we can learn many things about its parts. When we do this, the fish is no longer a living organism. In the same way, if we analyze the Bible with our human reason, based on historical or higher criticism, we may understand many specific elements in detail but not grasp the life of God. God’s word is living and active; it was inspired by the Holy Spirit. Without the help of the Holy Spirit we cannot understand the deep meaning. Nevertheless, professors in many seminaries and university divinity schools ignore the necessity of the Holy Spirit’s help. They teach about the Bible, but do not believe that the Bible is the living word of God. Their influence has been poisonous, and is effective in the lives of many young people even today. As a result, so many

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people have become spiritually sick and lost their faith. So, we should be on guard against this bad influence.

After rebuking the poisonous religious leaders, Jesus left them and went away. He and his disciples went across the lake by boat. It seems that they left in a hurry, and the disciples forgot to take bread (5). When they realized this, they suddenly lost all the grace of Jesus from their hearts. They began to feel guilt for their mistake and nervous about the future. What would they eat for breakfast? Jesus said to them, **“Be careful. Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees”** (6). When they heard the word “yeast,” they associated it with bread. They had a conference and concluded that Jesus was rebuking them for not bringing bread. They felt more guilt and anxiety. Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, **“You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread?”** They had totally misunderstood Jesus’ words and missed the point of his teaching.

Let’s see how Jesus helped them. He asked four more questions: **“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? 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”** (9-11). Then they said, “Oh! He’s not talking about bread, but about the teachings of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (12).

Jesus treated their problem as a faith problem. It was not a lack of intelligence, but of faith. Jesus was always gracious, understanding and gentle. However, in training his disciples in faith, Jesus was sharp, direct and clear. It was because their faith in him is so vitally important. We can overlook the importance of faith and think something else is more important: grades, jobs, money, medical needs, relationships, etc. But to Jesus, our faith in him is most important. In this critical moment, Jesus first rebuked the disciples’ lack of faith: **“You of little faith.”** They should realize that what they need is faith.

Then how can they have faith? Jesus said, **“Don’t you remember?”** Then he reminded them of what he had done and how they had participated in

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it. They had seen with their eyes his feeding of great crowds with a few loaves and fish on two occasions. In fact, they had gathered with their hands baskets of leftovers on both occasions. These events should be dominant in their memories. Jesus wanted them to think and act based on his works and words, not how they felt at the moment, or as dictated by the situation. When Jesus does wonderful things in our lives, it is to help us trust him, grow in faith and be able to experience his power and love increasingly as time goes by. Jesus wants us to have faith that overcomes the world and renders glory to God. This faith enabled William Carey to challenge the rigid religious leaders of his times. While they were saying, “If God wants to evangelize the heathen, he will do so without any help from you or me,” Carey said, “Expect great things from God; attempt great things for God.” He went out as a missionary and many others were inspired to follow in his footsteps.

Do you want to have great faith in Jesus? Let’s remember what Jesus has done. Jesus died for our sins and rose again from the dead to give us victory over death, eternal life and the glorious kingdom of heaven. Jesus has given us his Holy Spirit who works in our hearts with mercies that our new every morning. Let’s not remember our failures, or give in to the hard situations we face. Let’s remember what Jesus has done for us and live by faith in him. Jesus gives us peace and victory 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year (Jn 16:33b). We should not live as Monday morning atheists. May God help us remember what Jesus has done and live dynamic lives of faith as Jesus’ disciples and world changers.