

## A SENSE OF HISTORY

Mark 8:11-21

Key Verse: 8:19

*"When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" "Twelve," they replied.*

The title of today's message is a sense of history. This passage is very short and obvious that there seems to be not much to think about. But it teaches us about the importance of having a sense of history. Animals do not have a sense of history; they live by their instinct. But we are God's people created in his own image. There is a saying that "those who ignore history are doomed to repeat it." Let us think about why and how we should have a sense of history in God.

### I. A SIGN-SEEKING MENTALITY (11-13)

Look at verse 11. *"The Pharisees came and began to question Jesus. To test him, they asked him for a sign from heaven."* The Pharisees had already seen enough signs. They knew how Jesus fed a crowd of 4,000 with only seven loaves of bread and a few fish. The hungry crowd was satisfied and Jesus' disciples collected 12 basketfuls of the leftover pieces. Jesus had also healed the blind, the crippled, the mute and deaf, and many other sick people. These miraculous signs were more than enough to convince them who Jesus was. Yet, they were asking for another sign. To test Jesus, they asked him for a sign from heaven. By asking a sign from heaven, they seemed to insinuate that all of his previous miracles were some sort of coincidence or magic art, not from God. They insisted that Jesus show a spectacular sign displayed in the sky that only God could perform. Jesus knew their crooked motive in asking for a sign and refused to show off his divine power. He knew even a miracle in the sky would not convince them that he was the Messiah because they had already decided not to believe in him. 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."* The motive of the Pharisees was wicked when they asked for a miraculous sign from heaven. They wanted to discredit the work of God Jesus was doing. Jesus sighed deeply and said that he would not comply. Jesus refused to be a vending machine that spit out miracles on demand.

There is a spiritual problem with the sign-seeking people. A woman had cancer and her doctors gave her only a few months to live. People around her prayed and God worked a miracle for her. She was cured of her cancer. Her doctors could not explain it. But later on, she wasn't so sure if it was the work of God. She wondered if it was the chemotherapy or other treatment that healed her. People seemed to believe when they see a miracle, but their faith fades quickly when the miracle is gone. This is the reason why Jesus did not trust those who believed him because of his miracles (Jn 2:23-25).

Have you asked for a miracle from heaven? Perhaps you had a wish to win a multi-million dollar lottery. Perhaps not. But there may be other ways we tend to seek miracles without even realizing it. We would be seeking a miracle if we wanted to receive an A in a

class without putting our efforts to study. We would be seeking a miracle if we wanted to raise up disciples of Jesus without shepherding a person through faithful Bible studies and prayer. Let us pray that we may not become miracle-seeking people but to be faithful men and women of God. Besides, God has shown us plenty of small and big miracles among us. The biggest miracle happens, I think, when a sinner becomes a man or woman of faith and commits his or her life to serve the Lord as his disciple. Each of us has experienced this miracle. Let us hold on to the grace of God and serve the Lord wholeheartedly throughout our lives.

Look at verse 13. *"Then he left them, got back into the boat and crossed to the other side."* Jesus left the sign-seeking Pharisees and went across the lake. Jesus was refreshed by the sea breeze and at the same time, his heart was heavy when he thought about the Pharisees asking for a sign from heaven. He was sorry that his chosen people did not see the work that God was doing through his Son.

## II. "WATCH OUT FOR THE YEAST" (14-16)

As they were headed toward the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, Jesus' disciples discovered a problem that preoccupied their minds. Look at verse 14. *"The disciples had forgotten to bring bread, except for one loaf they had with them in the boat."* They realized that they did not bring enough bread for themselves. We know that the disciples were always hungry. Jesus and they were always busy with taking care of the people coming to him that they rarely kept their meal time regularly (Mk 2:23; 3:20). Besides, they did not know where their next meal would come from. They did not hold regular jobs. They had no regular income. So it is understandable that they were concerned about their food.

On the other hand, they had just witnessed for the second time how Jesus fed a large crowd of people with a small amount of bread and fish. They should not have worried about what to eat as long as they were with Christ. Jesus wanted them to believe that when they sought first God's kingdom and his righteousness, God would provide them what they needed (Mt 6:33).

Still, Jesus knew that his disciples were spiritually young and they envied other people who seemed to have everything in life. The Pharisees walked around in their purple robes and they did not seem to worry about what to eat. The disciples envied them for that. King Herod was a ruthless and immoral man, and yet he seemed to enjoy food and wine everyday along with many other nice things in life. The disciples were envious of him.

What did Jesus say to his disciples? Look at verse 15. *"Be careful," Jesus warned them. "Watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod."* A tiny amount of yeast can ferment a large amount of dough to make bread. The yeast here is the symbol of evil corruption. Jesus warned his disciples to be wary of the evil influence of the Pharisees and Herod Antipas. The bad influence of the Pharisees included their hypocrisy—they looked holy and righteous before men, but they had no love of God. They tried to test the Son of God by asking for a sign from heaven after seeing many miracles. The yeast of Herod included his immoral life. He was a political leader of his people. He was in a

position to have an impact on people through his life. And he chose to live a godless life. He did not realize how he was not only hurting his life but also many other people's lives. The disciples were to become future spiritual leaders of God's people. They had to learn the importance of living a life of good influence before God.

How did the disciples respond to Jesus' warning? Look at verse 16. *They discussed this with one another and said, "It is because we have no bread."* After a discussion among themselves, they concluded that Jesus was talking about the lack of bread. They totally missed the point Jesus was warning them about. How could they do this? It was because they were self-centered. They were preoccupied with their own problem, so they missed Jesus' point. They heard what Jesus said, but failed to listen to him. They did not have the ears to hear.

When Jesus said, "yeast," they immediately thought of bread. To find out what is in the subconscious mind of a person, psychologists play a game of word association or do the Rorschach inkblot test. The disciples might have blurted out the word, "bread," in response to words such as oven, fire, table, and, of course, yeast. They might have said, "bread," if they were shown inkblots that looked like a stone, a mountain, the shiny head of a person, or a book. The point is that they had a preoccupation with their bread problem. Some of us have this tendency when we write our Bible testimonies. Instead of meditating on the word of God and accept what it teaches, we would go off on a tangent and talk about what is on our minds instead. We cannot hear what Jesus says in this way. We must deny our own preoccupation so that we may accept the word of God.



A small amount of yeast can affect an entire batch of dough. Influence is invisible, but its impact is significant. Jesus' public ministry lasted only for three years. His ministry was mainly preaching the kingdom of God, healing the sick and raising his 12 disciples. He spent much of his time helping a group of hillbillies. He did not train his disciples by giving special lectures. He trained them through his common life together with them. It seems that he did not do much. But his life of love, sacrifice and service had a big impact on their lives. He sacrificially served sinners to the end, finally giving his life on the cross. His influence on humanity continues throughout history. Let us pray that we may watch out the evil influence of those who do not live before God. Let us watch out for the yeast of the Pharisees and that of Herod. And let us pray that we may have a good influence on young people of our time by living a life of faith and mission before God.

### III. "DON'T YOU REMEMBER?" (17-21)

Look at verses 17-21. *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? Do you have eyes but fail to see, and ears but fail to hear? And don't you*

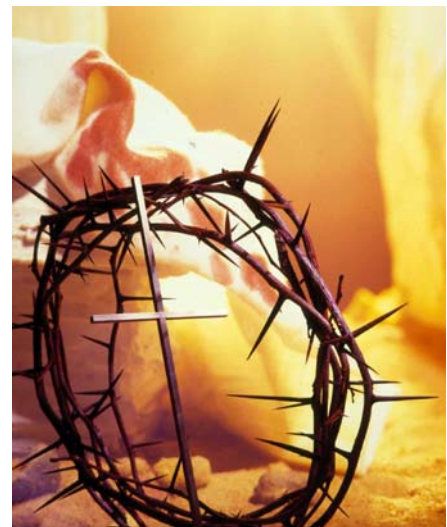
*remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" "Twelve," they replied. "And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?" They answered, "Seven." He said to them, "Do you still not understand?"*

Jesus was aware of the discussion among his disciples. When they concluded that he was talking about bread, he began to ask them several rhetorical questions. He asked them, *"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?"* This was one of the few times Jesus used harsh words to rebuke his disciples. They had been following Jesus for a while now. They had witnessed with their eyes the work of God Jesus did among people. They heard him speaking the words of God many, many times. But the message was not going through. It was not registering in their minds. Jesus rebuked them for hardening their hearts by paying attention to their bread problem only.

Then Jesus asked, *"And don't you remember? When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?"* Again Jesus asked, *"And when I broke the seven loaves for the four thousand, how many basketfuls of pieces did you pick up?"* Jesus reminded them that not long ago he fed the five thousand people with five loaves and two fish. Again, Jesus reminded them that he fed the four thousand people with seven loaves and a few fish. They really didn't have to worry about bread as long as they were with Jesus.

Jesus asked his disciples, "Don't you remember?" This is the question Jesus asks us also. We learn that we must remember what Jesus has done in our lives. We must bring all our problems and burdens to Jesus and listen to him with an open heart. We sinners are forgetful. We are forgetful of God's grace. When God led the Israelites out of Egypt, they praised the grace of God. However, as soon as their journey to the Promised Land became a little bit inconvenient, they forgot about the grace of God and began to complain about every small difficulty. They had no sense of God's history. It is very important for God's people who are forgiven sinners to remember the grace of God.

How can we have a sense of history in God? We must remember what God has done for us through his one and only Son Jesus Christ. Once, Jesus healed a man who had been born blind. The man had suffered endlessly because of his blindness. But Jesus had mercy on him. Jesus had no medical instrument with him. So he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man's eyes. Then the man washed in the pool of Siloam and began to see right away. However, the jealous Pharisees intimidated the man to deny what Jesus had done for him. But the man held firmly the grace of Jesus for his life. Despite the enormous pressure from the religious authorities, he declared, "I don't know much. But one thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!" (Jn 9:25)



Again, how can we have a sense of history in God? We must remember that Jesus fed the 5,000 with five loaves and two fish out of his compassion. We must remember that Jesus suffered and died on the cross to wash away all our dirty sins with his precious blood. We must remember that Jesus was raised on the third day so that we may have eternal life in his eternal kingdom. We must remember his promise that he will come again in his glory to judge the living and the dead.

We learned today that it is important for us to have a sense of history. God is doing his work of salvation in and around us. Let us open our eyes to see the beautiful work that Jesus is doing among us. Let us overcome our preoccupation with our daily grinds so that we may hear Jesus in our hearts. May God help us to watch out for the yeast of this world and have a good influence on people around us! May God help us to have a sense of history!