

Do you know what we call it when God breaks the law? A miracle. No, God does not go outside of his moral law, that is his very character, but he does work outside of the laws of nature that he has established for our planet. It is the power of God that created and sustains the natural world. It is also the power of God that does things that make no sense within the limited framework of the natural world. The good news of miracles is that God is not bound by the things that bind us.

This study is about miracles in the kingdom. Matthew 13:54-17:27 describes 9 miracles. There are five stories of healing, two descriptions of multiplying food, a story of walking on water and the scene of the transfiguration.

The question that will drive our study is, **what are we to remember from miracles?**

What got me started asking this question is a series of questions that Jesus asked in Matthew 16. His disciples were confused about something he said about leaven. They thought he was talking about physical bread, but he was really talking about the teachings of the scribes and pharisees. In his effort to correct their understanding Jesus asked a series of 5 questions, in quick succession, the way you might do if you were a bit frustrated with someone's slowness to learn. Listen to his questions.

**Matthew 16:8-11** "O you of little faith, why are you discussing among yourselves the fact that you have no bread? <sup>9</sup> Do you not yet perceive? Do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? <sup>10</sup> Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? <sup>11</sup> How is it that you fail to understand that I did not speak about bread?"

The pivotal questions were about remembering two miracles they had experienced. The suggestion in the questions is that if they would have remembered the miracles they would not have failed to understand what Jesus was talking about.

Remembering the miracles helps us understand what God is telling us. Jesus is telling them that they don't understand what he is trying to communicate to them because they don't remember the lesson they should have learned in the miracles they experienced.

This is where my question comes from, **what are we to remember from miracles?**

When I look closely at the text, I find four major realities to remember from the miracles that will help us understand Jesus better.

### **Thing to Remember #1...**

What is the alternative to natural?

The world's alternative to natural is artificial. We have natural and artificial options for the juice we drink, the flowers we decorate with, and the ingredients we cook with. We are not limited to what is natural. We have artificial body parts, artificial snow, even artificial intelligence.

Natural and artificial are the only categories the world has to work with. Everything has a natural cause or an artificial cause, a natural solution or an artificial solution. But the believer has another option.

So, what is the alternative to natural? The world's alternative to natural is artificial. The believer's alternative to natural is supernatural. What a wonderful alternative.

***Remember the reality of the supernatural.***

When a believer looks to understand the world around them, they have this additional category. When we look for solutions to our problems, sources of our energy, or supply for our ability, we have an additional category. It may not happen naturally. It may not be something that we can artificially manufacture. It may be something that only happens in the category of the supernatural. The kingdom of heaven is a supernatural reality. If we don't have a category of the supernatural, we don't see the possibilities of the kingdom.

Listen to this summary of a news report from March 2015.

"Lynn Jennifer Groesbeck, 25, lost control of her car and landed in the icy Spanish Fork River in Utah. Fourteen hours later, first responders found her 18-month-old daughter, Lily, in her car seat hanging upside down just above frigid river water. Prior to finding Lily, both police officers and firefighters report that they heard an adult voice yell "Help me!" from inside the car. They discovered that the voice could not have come from the young mother, who likely died from the impact. The rescuers still can't explain the voice or how the girl survived hanging upside-down for 14 hours in freezing temperatures without being dressed for the cold."<sup>i</sup>

And you know exactly why they can't explain it. There is no natural explanation, and no artificial explanation, only a supernatural explanation.

Even those who believe in the supernatural default to processing life in the natural. The disciples had experienced more striking supernatural events than I have. But still, their first response to Jesus' comments was to think on a natural level.

If Jesus appears frustrated when he asked the 5 questions in Matthew 12, I suggest that it is because the disciples were worried about not having bread when he had recently given them 9,000 loaves to not worry about having enough bread. If he could feed the 5,000 and the 4,000, he is probably not worried about the fact that they didn't pack a lunch. They were not processing things right in the moment with him because they didn't remember the miracles in a way that made the supernatural a possibility in their minds. We should always keep the door open for the possibility of a miracle.

Do you ever disregard the possibility of the supernatural? Do you ever forget about it? Do you ever think that it doesn't apply or that it is not for you? The kingdom of heaven is supernatural.

So Jesus asked, "don't you remember?" Don't you remember that God created all things with a word? Don't you remember that there is a Spirit that lives in us? Don't you remember that God

is present with you? Don't you remember a time when something you experienced could not be explained by natural causes? Don't you remember that there are options available that we cannot conceive of until Jesus makes them happen?

**Thing to Remember #1... *Remember the reality of the supernatural.***

**Thing to Remember #2...**

**Matthew 16:9-10** Do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many baskets you gathered? <sup>10</sup> Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many baskets you gathered?

Jesus didn't only remind them of the two mass feeding miracles. He reminded them of how many baskets were left over after everyone ate.

How could you forget leftovers? Leftovers are my favorite kind of food. Last year after Valley2Village my wife was part of a team that made a massive amount of Indian food. And there was a massive amount of leftovers. I loved it. I was offering dahl and naan bread to everyone who was hanging around the church. When you finish a meal and there was "just enough" that means that there was not enough. People just said they had enough to be polite. Leftovers are a symbol of abundance. They communicate that the needs were met and there was still more available.

***Remember the abundance of God's provision.***

When Jesus was talking about leaven and they didn't understand, they made an assumption. They assumed that he was talking about them not bringing bread. Notice this, their first reaction to being confused by Jesus was to assume that Jesus was talking about them not being enough. They thought that Jesus was calling out their fault, lack, mistake, or insufficiency. What picture of God is this? What picture of religion is this? When God is trying to get our attention we misinterpret it as him calling attention to our shortcomings.

At the same time that we worry that we won't have enough time to do all that we have committed to, we worry that we are not doing enough. At the same time that we worry we are not serving enough, we worry that we are not righteous enough to serve. We are not smart enough. We don't have enough patience. We can't find enough volunteers. We haven't raised enough money. We didn't bring enough bread. When we start talking this way Jesus asks, "Don't you remember how many baskets you gathered?". Don't you remember that Jesus provides abundantly? We can stop living in scarcity and insufficiency. God is not upset with you for being small and weak! He invites you into his abundance.

Why are you so worried about not measuring up, not producing, don't you remember how many baskets you gathered? God wants our focus to be on his abundance, not on our lack.

It must have been a difficult task to gather those leftovers. In the feeding of the 5,000 it was already evening before the miracle happened. So, after the feast, it was likely dark. There

weren't just plates of untouched food to take care of, but "broken pieces" (14:20) scattered about the countryside. It would have been easy to come up with reasons why they didn't need to clean up after the group. It was dark. After all, the food was free. Jesus could make more. They could consider it a donation to the birds. But no, they collected the pieces into baskets. I imagine after the 12 baskets and later the 7, they had sore backs, they were tired, they probably missed as many pieces as they gathered, and they didn't intend to eat the leftovers. Why did they do it? Because Jesus doesn't want us to forget the leftovers. He wants us to trust that there is more abundance after his supply is used up than there was when our supply was fresh.

He doesn't just want you to remember that he got you through the cancer but that there were leftovers when your character grew in the process? Don't you remember how he carried you through that emotional breakdown you had last week and how many baskets you gathered of insight into how he made you? Don't you remember that when your church family helped meet that physical need, you gathered baskets afterward because of how their love met your emotional needs as well?

### **Set up for thing to remember #3 and #4...**

The first two points to remember come straight from the questions that Jesus asked. The next two come from a comparison of the two miracles that Jesus mentions.

The feeding of the 5,000 appears in all gospels. Each account is similar but also reveals an angle or two that the others don't. The feeding of the 4,000 appears only in Matthew and Mark. In both gospel accounts, the feeding of the 5,000 appears before the feeding of the 4,000. So I am going to assume that we should see the development of how the disciples relate to miracles. They experienced something in the feeding of the 5,000 that they should have remembered in the feeding of the 4,000. We grow when we experience God. The feeding of the 5,000 would have been a powerful experience for them. So I am assuming that when the story of the feeding of the 4,000 occurs, the disciples were more spiritually mature and had more awareness and faith in the supernatural. We should see them remembering something from the first mass feeding that helps them trust Jesus in the second mass feeding.

So, when we compare the two, do we discover any notable differences in the behavior of the disciples?

Consider some basic similarities and differences as outlined in the chart on the next page.

<b>Feeding of the 5,000</b> (Matthew 14:17; Mark 6:38; Luke 9:16; John 6:9)	<b>Feeding of the 4,000</b> (Matthew 15:34; Mark 8:5-7)
Jesus had compassion that is noted as narration by Matthew (14:14)	Jesus had compassion that is directly expressed to the disciples (15:32)
Disciples identify the problem (14:15)	Jesus identifies the problem (15:32)
Disciples propose a solution (14:15)	Disciples ask Jesus about possible solutions (15:33)
The disciples <b>tell</b> Jesus what is wrong and what he needs to do.	The disciples <b>listen</b> to Jesus about what is wrong and <b>ask</b> him about what to do.
Jesus rejects their solution and <b>tells</b> them what to do instead (14:16)	
They protest Jesus' solution (14:17)	They dialogue with Jesus about his solution (15:34; Mark 8:4)
They skeptically suggest the natural solution of buying bread (Mark 6:37; Luke 9:13)	
Jesus continues giving instructions (14:18)	
Jesus feeds everyone and there are leftovers (14:19-21)	Jesus feeds everyone and there are leftovers (15:35-39)

Do you notice that there are a few less steps in the feeding of the 4,000? This is because the disciples remembered some things from the first miracle and it caused them to be more in line with Jesus in the second miracle. I see two major things they remembered. We see them **asking** Jesus rather than **telling** Jesus because they remembered that Jesus understands the problem better than they do and he has better solutions than they do.

Back in Matthew 16, when Jesus tells the disciples to watch out for the leaven of the scribes and Pharisees, the disciples don't get it. But instead of asking him about the problem he was referring to they started making guesses. And instead of arriving at supernatural solutions, like Jesus guiding them in the right teaching, they came up with a natural solution like, bringing bread next time. We must remember this problem and solution thing from the miracles we experience.

**Thing to Remember #3... Remember that Jesus understands the problem better than you do.**

The problem was the same in both stories. The people needed food and there wasn't food for them in that countryside. It was a desolate place, and the day was over. The difference centers on being in tune with the heart of God. In the feeding of the 5,000 the disciples suggested that Jesus send them away because they didn't understand the heart of compassion that Jesus had for the people. In the feeding of the 4,000 they listened to the heart of Jesus and heard that his compassion would not allow them to be sent away.

In the feeding of the 4,000 the disciples let Jesus describe the problem to them instead of them informing Jesus of the problem. This is something to remember. When he asked, “do you not remember the five loaves for the five thousand?”, he was partially saying, “Don’t you know that the problem is much more clearly seen from my supernatural viewpoint than it is from your natural viewpoint?” Often, we don’t even know what the problem is.

Jesus loves to hear from you. He is not going to be offended if you tell him what you think the problem is. But don’t spend all your energy there. Don’t you remember? Part of the miracle is when we listen and he tells us about the problem, then we start to see his heart behind what we thought the problem was.

Do you see some problems? Maybe it seems to you like Jesus just doesn’t see those problems and you need to tell him. Don’t you remember that when you thought that you were a terrible parent, Jesus helped you see that you were not spending enough time with him to be able to love your kids well? Don’t you remember that when you thought the problem was that you had no value, Jesus loved you and helped you see that actually, you were depressed? Don’t you remember that when you thought you didn’t have enough money Jesus showed you that the real issue was that you didn’t trust him with the money he provided? Don’t you remember that Jesus understands the problem better than you do?

When the disciples were talking about not bringing bread, they were trying to figure out the problem on their own. From this, Jesus knew that they were not remembering the five loaves and the 5,000.

#### **Thing to Remember #4... Remember that Jesus has a better solution than you do.**

In the feeding of the 5,000, the disciple’s solution was to tell Jesus to “send the crowds away to go into the villages and buy food for themselves.” This was a command to Jesus. Jesus turned around and gave a command to them. Has it ever occurred to you that miracles happen more often when we submit to Jesus rather than try to control him?

After refusing to obey their command, Jesus offered a different solution. And it was better. Why do we try to be in control of solving our problems when we could cooperate with a miracle working God?

Jesus tests us to see if we will trust him for solutions. One of those details that John adds to the story of the feeding of the 5,000 is that Jesus tested Philip by suggesting a natural solution to the problem that was recently handled supernaturally.

**John 6:5-6** Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a large crowd was coming toward him, Jesus said to Philip, “Where are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?” <sup>6</sup>He said this to test him, for he himself knew what he would do.

This was a super easy test. Jesus was doing incredible miracles that should have given Philip evidence of his ability to have a supernatural solution to the problem.

The point is that Jesus sets us up to see if we will remember the miracles and if we will let him orchestrate the solution to our problems. He lets us sit with questions hoping that we will remember to look to him for the solutions. While we are stressing and trying to arrange solutions, he already knows what he will do and he just wants to know if you will trust him for a supernatural solution.

Don't you remember that your money was miraculously stretched when you didn't have enough? Don't you remember how you were given extra energy to care for an aging parent? Don't you remember how the right word came at the right moment when you silently cried out to Jesus in that difficult conversation? Don't you remember how God empowered volunteers to build this church and school building? Don't you remember how when we said good bye to one incredible school principle God arranged for another to come and lead in exactly the ways our school needed? Don't you remember that when a flood disrupted our entire school program, and the professionals were not available, people showed up in masses to prevent the damage from spreading? Don't you remember how this building was paid off, how the gym was paid for, how the gym floor was paid for? Don't you remember that Jesus **has a better solution than you do**? What are we to remember from miracles?

- Thing to Remember #1... Remember the reality of the supernatural.
- Thing to Remember #2... Remember the abundance of God's provision.
- Thing to Remember #3... Remember that Jesus understands the problem better than you do.
- Thing to Remember #4... Remember that Jesus has a better solution than you do.

All of this remembrance of miracles was a side note along the way to explaining that to "Watch and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees" meant to beware of the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees.

Their teaching was dangerous partially because they had not learned the right lessons from the miracles.

In Matthew 13:53-17:27 we see a decrease in the scribes and Pharisees faith in Jesus as the Messiah and an increase in the faith of the disciples.

In just a few verses after this teaching we read Peter confess, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." (Matthew 16:16). At the beginning of the section, we saw Jesus' hometown people reject him. (Matthew 13:54-58). What was the difference? Peter learned from and remembered the 5 loaves for the 5,000 and the 7 loaves for the 4,000. The world around us, including some of the religious world, does not remember the miracles. We are surrounded by the kingdom of the world that only acknowledges the natural. But we are called to live in the kingdom of heaven. To do that, we must remember the miracles!

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.beliefnet.com/inspiration/7-modern-miracles-that-science-cant-explain.aspx>