

Jesus, Our Good Shepherd
Mark 6:30-44
Key Verse: 6:34

“When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things.”

In this passage Jesus reveals his divine compassion on mankind and performs an amazing miracle. Jesus fed five thousand people with five loaves and two fish. Jesus reveals the image of a good shepherd for all mankind. Jesus saw our real need. Jesus restored our love relationship with God. Jesus makes our lives blessed and fruitful when we live by faith in him. Those who know Jesus can be shepherds for others.

I. Jesus' divine compassion (30-34).

Verse 30 says, “The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught.” It was a glorious report session. The apostles had been ordinary men. They despaired over hardships and were often fearful. However, during their fieldwork training they had experienced the power of God. Their lives were changed forever. In the past, Peter's big mouth was like a noisy gong that disturbed everyone, while accomplishing little. But now, when he opened his mouth, demons fled before him, many people repented; people were saved. Peter tasted the hope of Jesus for him to be a godly leader. As Peter testified to God's work through him, he looked most impressive and truly great. Then John spoke up. With quiet passion he told how he had met a man suffering with a wasting disease. Then as John anointed him with oil and prayed, the sickness was completely healed. The man thanked John and followed him wherever he went. In fact, John finished his report by introducing the man, and everyone said “Wow.” In the past Bartholomew was a chronic underachiever, a little like Bart Simpson, but with a decent vocabulary. Now he told how he had laid his hands on the sick and they were healed. The usually quiet Bart extended his hands before the others and said, “Through these hands, the sick were healed! Glory to God!” Especially at Bart's report, all the disciples were amazed and they said, “Amen,” in unison. When they finished reporting they formed a semi-circle before Jesus and began to sing, “Faith is the victory! Faith is the victory! Oh glorious victory that overcomes the world!”

During this report session so many people were coming and going. They had been healed and delivered by Jesus and his disciples. They wanted to hang around their shepherds. The apostles had become a source of blessing. They found meaning and joy. For the first time, they forgot about eating. In a word, their spirits were soaring.

Jesus said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest” (31). The disciples needed rest. Jesus knew that when their emotions calmed down they would be completely exhausted. They needed some physical rest and something to eat. Even more, they needed spiritual recharging that comes from quiet time with Jesus. So they got into a boat and set off across the Sea of Galilee once again. Perhaps the disciples fell asleep, one by one, until only Jesus was left to sail the boat. As they slept the disciples dreamed of a delicious barbecue, a softball game, and a camping trip with a big bonfire and sleeping under the stars. However, their dreams were disrupted.

Look at verse 33. “But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.” What a surprise! The very people they had left behind were waiting at the retreat place and greeted them, “Welcome, shepherds, please take care of us continually.” The disciples had to face reality. They might have made plastic smiles to cover the sinking feeling in their hearts.

However, Jesus' reaction was quite different. Look at verse 34. “When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.” Jesus did not feel burdened at all. Rather, Jesus had compassion on them. Jesus welcomed them gladly. Jesus considered their situation and their dire need. They were so desperate that they had run around the lake to meet him. Jesus' heart was moved. Jesus took their burdens as his own. Without a second thought Jesus began to serve them.

When we look at verse 34 carefully we find clearly why Jesus had compassion on them. It was because they were like sheep without a shepherd. Sheep are very vulnerable and helpless animals. They need their shepherd for guidance, protection and care. They are different than dogs. If a dog leaves his home, he can find his way back. But if a sheep wanders away, it is lost. Mankind without God is lost. The image of a sheep without a shepherd may be

the best expression of the lostness of mankind. Thus Jesus' compassion was primarily spiritual concern for man's soul. Jesus wanted to restore their love relationship with God. So he began teaching them many things. To Jesus, this was most urgent, so urgent that he canceled his plan for a retreat.

These days many Christians don't acknowledge the lostness of mankind. Last week I attended the Pastors' Conference at the Moody Bible Institute, and heard a presentation by Dr. Marvin Newell, executive director of the IFMA. He referred to a recent Barna poll of American Christians. They were asked, "If a man dies without Christ what will happen to him?" Among them, 60% could not say that they were lost. Rather, they indicated that people would find some other way to God besides Christ. Tragically, the influence of religious pluralism and cultural relativism has infiltrated the church. It leads to the conclusion that missionary work is unnecessary. Such relativism tries to negate divine compassion. Acts 4:12 says, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." We must believe what the Bible says: only Jesus saves. Men without Christ are lost; without hope, without God in the world (Eph 2:12).

Jesus' compassion sprang from a spiritual view of man. Jesus' compassion was expressed through teaching. Jesus wanted lost people to know that God loved them and sought them. John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." Jesus wanted them to repent of their sins and restore their love relationship with God. Jesus wanted to give them the victory that comes from faith in God's love. Jesus wanted to give them living hope in the kingdom of God. Jesus wanted to wipe away all their despair, sorrow and fear and to restore them as children of God. This is the compassion of Jesus.

II. Jesus said, "You give them something to eat" (35-38).

Jesus taught the crowd of people all day long. When he finished one story, he told another. To the captivated crowds, hours seemed like minutes as their souls drank in the living water. However, the disciples were growing restless. In the back of their minds, they were looking forward to their vacation. They wanted the meeting to end. They looked at their watches, then looked at Jesus. Sometimes, Jesus seemed to conclude, but then took a fresh breath and started all over. Finally the disciples felt they had to go and interrupt Jesus. They approached him all together and said, "Teacher, this is a remote place, and it's already very late. Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat" (35,36).

How did Jesus answer? Look at verse 37. "But he answered, 'You give them something to eat.'" Jesus refused their request. Jesus' basic attitude is to welcome God's sheep anytime, anywhere. Jesus did not send people away. To Jesus, the time to help them was always now. Jesus wanted his disciples to have this attitude. This time, the disciples were stunned. We would have been, too. In retrospect, what was Jesus teaching them? Let's consider three things.

First, Jesus wanted them to have a sense of responsibility for the crowd. To Jesus the real problem was that no one had a sense of responsibility for the people. The religious leaders should have been their shepherds. But they only made use of people for their benefit (Mk 3:2). The political leaders, such as Herod, were slaves of sin, and instruments of the devil. Compared to them, Jesus' disciples did well to identify the need of the people. However, Jesus wanted them to do more. Jesus wanted them to take responsibility for the crowd. Many people analyze problems without doing anything. Jesus wanted his disciples to take responsibility.

This is Memorial Day weekend, when we remember those who have purchased our freedom and defended our nation with their lives. In his book, "The Greatest Generation," Tom Brokaw describes the brave Americans who fought World War II. They were willing to make great sacrifices, even the supreme sacrifice, because they felt responsible for their nation and the world. They did this quietly and without complaining. There are some today who are following in their footsteps, and we thank God for them. But by and large, our generation is marked by a sense of entitlement. Many people think that everything has been given purely for their pleasure. Fifty years ago, most couples would not divorce, even if they lost all pleasure from their union. It was for the sake of their children. They had a sense of responsibility, anyway. Nowadays, many abandon their children to pursue pleasure. There is a generation gap in the sense of responsibility. The least we can do is to give respect to those who sacrifice their lives for our nation. Better yet, we can learn a sense of responsibility for our own nation.

Jesus wants us to accept responsibility for young Americans. David Hull was once an irresponsible young man who sang the blues. Then he met Jesus as his true shepherd through the ministry of Dr. Jim Rabchuk. He began to sing

praises to Jesus from his heart, like King David. We have enjoyed his ministry in the vocal team. From today he is stepping down to focus on shepherding NU students. Moreover, he has taken the heavy burden of coordinating the Purdue International Conference 2008. He is a responsible shepherd for America. Praise God!

Second, Jesus wanted them to learn his compassion. Jesus' compassion was flowing like a river. Jesus cared for the spiritual needs of the crowd, and now he wanted to feed them as well. Jesus' compassion was for the whole person—body, mind and soul. Jesus' compassion was not just for one person, but for a whole crowd of five thousand people. Jesus' compassion is like the ocean water; it covers all the creatures in the ocean, embracing and nourishing them all at the same time. Jesus' compassion is divine compassion. With this compassion, Jesus was happy to serve the crowd until all their needs were met. Jesus wanted his disciples to share this compassion with him.

Third, Jesus wanted them to learn faith in God Almighty. The disciples had just experienced the power of God in their lives. But when they confronted the hungry crowd of people, they again fell into human calculation and suggested a human solution. Jesus wanted them to change this pattern. As they had begun to live by faith, Jesus wanted them to continue in faith. Jesus wanted them to feed the crowd by faith.

How did the disciples respond? Look at verse 37b. "They said to him, 'That would take eight months of a man's wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?'" It was a kind of protest. The disciples thought that since they had no money, they could not do anything. They had just experienced that Jesus used them greatly when they had no money with them. But again they fell into a money-power mentality. We may wonder at this. However, many among us also think that without money we cannot do anything.

How did Jesus help his disciples? Look at verse 38. "'How many loaves do you have?' he asked. 'Go and see.' When they found out, they said, 'Five—and two fish.'" Jesus helped them to go and see. When they began to obey Jesus practically, their attitudes began to change. They became positive. They found some loaves, and they also found some fish. Jesus had not asked for fish. The disciples were going beyond the letter of the command to obey it from their hearts. Now they were fully cooperating with Jesus. This was a turning point in this event. Jesus' faith to train his disciples was changing them little by little.

III. Jesus feeds the five thousand (39-44).

After the disciples were connected to Jesus through their faith and had a positive attitude, Jesus directed them to have the people sit down in groups on the green grass. Among gospel writers, only Mark describes the "green" grass. It was not because of his environmental consciousness. Rather, it is related to Psalm 23, in which the good shepherd makes his sheep lie down in green pastures. It illustrates that the crowd was safe and secure in the care of our good shepherd. As many of our school teachers know, making people sit down can be difficult. However, when the disciples were right with Jesus, they had spiritual authority. People sensed the love and power of Jesus in them. People were willing to cooperate to receive Jesus' blessing. The disciples had become instruments that Jesus' power and love could work through.

Look at verse 41. "Taking the five loaves and two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves." Jesus accepted the loaves and the fish and blessed them. What we do is always small. But Jesus accepts and blesses the offering of faith, no matter how small. We must value, not despise, these offerings. Then Jesus looked up to heaven. Jesus was depending on God. Jesus wanted everyone to look up to God. Then Jesus gave thanks. Jesus must have thanked God for the loaves and the fish, and for the disciples' growing faith. Jesus may have thanked God in advance for what he was about to do. In any case, Jesus' basic attitude toward God was to be thankful always. Then Jesus broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people. He also divided the fish among them all. What happened? Verses 43-44 say, "They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. The number of men who had eaten was five thousand." Jesus' compassion produced this miracle. Jesus fed five thousand with five loaves and two fish.

Jesus is our good shepherd. Jesus saw the need of our souls and took responsibility by laying down his own life for us. Later Peter said of Jesus, "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls" (1Pe 2:24-25). To return to our shepherd Jesus solves all of

our problems. King David wrote, “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not be in want.” David lacked nothing and felt fully satisfied because the Lord was his Shepherd. Then David could also be a good shepherd for his people Israel.

Let’s return to Jesus, our good shepherd. Let’s learn his sense of responsibility, his divine compassion, and faith in God Almighty. May he use us to reach the lost in our times.