

Feeding Sheep

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[0 : 0 0] We'll turn now to the passage that we read together there in the Gospel of Mark 1st, chapter 6. And really the text that I want to hang our thoughts on this morning would be that of verse 34.

It says, when he went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

This passage, the feeding of the 5,000, it's one that's probably familiar to most of us. It's one of the few miracles that's included in all four Gospels.

And as we read over it, we may be guilty of just skimming past it, because we know the story, we know the outcome. But when you stop and think about it, the feeding of 5,000 men, plus women and children, and they were fed from only 5 loaves and 2 fish, it's quite extreme that we struggle to comprehend how that was possible.

It was only possible through the power of the Lord Jesus. Now to make that relative to us today, I went on to Google and said, well, what's the population of Stornoway?

[1 : 1 7] Stornoway has a population of 8,000, latest count, I believe. And so, if we did a conservative estimate of the feeding of the 5,000, and only allowed for 3,000 extra, it would equate to feeding Stornoway on maybe one or two park lunches, which we just can't fathom really.

So there's a lesson in this passage today, especially when we take into account the second reading that we had, where the disciples were on the boat, and they're mourning about the lack of food that they had.

They only had one loaf. Jesus is there saying to the disciples, Jesus reminds the disciples who he is and what he can do, because these who easily forgot the power he had, the ability he had to provide for them, and to meet their need, and we likewise, we can often forget the power of Jesus Christ, the ability he has to work in our lives, not so much in a material way, but in a spiritual way.

That's what I want to focus on this morning. Essentially, the man behind the miracle is the shepherd of the sheep here, the Son of God, and that idea of being a shepherd is really rooted in verse 34.

But he looks out on the people and he sees the people like sheep, sheep without a shepherd, sheep that are on the loose, sheep that have no guide.

[3 : 0 4] That's probably all an image that we're familiar with when you come across sheep on a pentland road, or other single track roads. They just get a fright when you come along in the car. They get scattered.

They don't know which way to go. Jesus sees the people like sheep without a shepherd. They're wondering. They've just been scattered. He sees them as lost people.

They need to be shown which way they need to go. And though it is not explicitly stated, because of the actions that he has, that we read about, Jesus becomes the shepherd to them.

Jesus becomes the shepherd to the sheep. And Jesus becomes also the fulfillment of Old Testament passages that I will just mention in passing, and particularly Psalm 23, which is familiar to us as well.

So Jesus is the shepherd to the sheep here. And he is a shepherd that has two clear characteristics for us to consider.

[4 : 21] He's a shepherd that is compassionate, first of all, but he's a shepherd that provides for the people. So he's a shepherd of compassion, and he is a shepherd of provision.

So firstly, if we turn and consider the shepherd of compassion. When we read this section here, the apostles returned to Jesus and told them all that they had done and taught.

And he said to them, come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest for a while. Tell the disciples they've been away, and they've returned and they're expressing.

It's just they're away. They're returning with excitement to tell everyone about all that happened while they were on their journey. But Jesus says, okay, come aside for a while.

Come away by yourselves to a desolate place with me and take rest. It says that they had no time even to busy that they've not stopped to eat, even in these good and exciting works.

[5 : 28] But Jesus in his wisdom tells them to come aside for a while. Come aside with him for a while. Jump into the boat and we'll go and sit together.

We'll discuss all that you have seen and heard, and we'll restore your minds and your bodies as we do so. And even here, there's a lesson for us, I think, that we can become so busy and consumed in good and exciting works that we forget to come aside for a while and be with Jesus.

We can forget to come aside and pray. Jesus reminds us that we must come aside and pray. We must take rest, but see when there's a momentum in our lives.

See when things are happening. See when things are exciting, and it's all for the work and good and the glory of God. It's hard to give ourselves time.

It's hard to come aside and pray with our Lord. But for the disciples and Jesus, the desire to come away for a while, but we find as we read through the passage that they didn't actually get time to rest together.

[6 : 57] They say it's a great multitude, and when he reaches the other side, all these people are there waiting for them. And this is probably the moment our compassion would have run out.

The desire just to take time to be with one another, to have a quiet time, and then there's people there just wanting something from you all the time.

These persistent sheep are just following you, looking to be fed from you. But Jesus here says that he'll have compassion on them.

He does not get angry with them. He does not get frustrated with them. He sits down. He tells them to sit down, and he teaches them.

And that's really what we see, firstly, in that passage. The people followed him, it wasn't because they wanted to be fed from him. They wanted to hear something from him.

[8 : 04] They had some form of need. They wanted to be fed from this shepherd.

They wanted to be taught from this man. They were like sheep without a shepherd, and he began to teach them many things.

Jesus fed their soul first. Jesus taught them first, with Jesus' compassion towards them.

He knew how helpless they were. He knew what they needed first, that they needed to be taught. They needed to hear about the things of God.

And he taught them with that love and compassion and patience. That stemmed from his compassion for them.

[9 : 08] Compassion is a word that really says two things. Compassion has compassion. Compassion says that they acknowledge that you are in need.

Compassion, if you feel compassion for someone, you can see that they have a need of some sort. But also you want to help them.

You want to alleviate them from your need. What it says is that compassion is, you see someone stricken by misfortune, you have a strong desire to alleviate that need, that suffering.

And if we think about ourselves as sheep, we are often lost in this world. And Jesus Christ and his compassion for us, he is the one that truly knows how stricken we are.

He is the one that truly knows how helpless we are, more than anyone else, and more than we ourselves know how helped towards each and every one of us.

[10 : 18] Knowing that we need him to rescue us. We need him to provide for us. And he is a shepherd who has that compassion, who sees her need, but has also sought to take that need, that helplessness, that suffering away from us, by providing a means of escape for us.

Jesus Christ died on the cross for us to take away the punishment and guilt of sin. Jesus Christ sees our need more than we do ourselves.

And it's only when we come to the teachings of Jesus Christ, when we come to the Bible, when Jesus teaches us as he taught first the people here.

Jesus sits in doings and teaches us, we need to be taught. We need to be taught first who we are. We need to be taught the things of God. We need to be taught that he is pure and cannot look upon sin.

We need to be taught that we need someone to set us free from the guilt that is in our lives. And we need to be taught that Jesus Christ died on us.

[11 : 41] We need to be taught that Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay for our sin. And it was our sin that he paid for in that punishment.

It's compassion towards each of us who are left stricken and helpless. It's compassion to each of us to set us free.

When we read through scripture, you can come across this word compassion. In the New Testament it appears about 12 times. And every time it describes Jesus Christ either in an action that he carries out, either in a parable, you think of the compassion of the good Samaritan, you think of the compassion of the Father of the prodigal Son.

There's one time when it's not directly related to him, it's a time where a Father cries out to Christ. Ask him for Jesus to have compassion on him and his family.

So it is relatable to Christ and it's a compassion like no other compassion. Every time it is used it is relatable to Christ. It is particular to Christ because this compassion of Christ is like no other compassion.

[13 : 08] He is the shepherd who has compassion on each and every one of us. He is the shepherd that is described in Ezekiel 34.

As the one that will seek out the lost, he will bring back those who have strayed. He will bind up those who are injured. He will strengthen those who are feeling weak.

We are the ones who are injured, we are the ones who are weak, but he is a good shepherd that will come to each of us and seize our need and will help us in our need.

He is a great shepherd that it also says will be set up over the people as one shepherd. My servant David, he shall feed them it says.

He shall feed them and be their shepherd. That's what's in Ezekiel. That's what God is trying to teach the people, one that would come.

[14 : 11] And here we have him in the passage here feeding the people. We are the sheep and he also feeds us.

We are the ones who are hungry. We are the ones that the world leaves dissatisfied. We are the one that often strays down the wrong paths, so you're saying to the kids, we follow the wrong things.

But he will go after those who have strayed, bind up those who know their sorrow and injuries, and he will have compassion on them.

Whatever you are today, the Lord Jesus will have compassion on you. And out of that compassion, he will provide, because he is a shepherd who secondly provides for us.

And the amazing provision of food in this passage, it's often the focus. Feeding of the 5,000, but it's just as much that he taught them first.

[15 : 30] Jesus does not send them away. He has more to teach them. He has more to feed them with.

He asks the disciples to go and feed them. How could they feed 5,000 people? The reason there in verse 37, shall we go and buy 200 denarii worth of bread and give it to them to eat?

That equates to about a year's worth of wages, the cost of 200 denarii. And as we said, we underestimated the number of people by saying 8,000.

But most commentators think that the number was closer to 10,000 to 15,000 when all the women and children were included, which makes it even more uncomprehensible of what has been done here.

So the disciples go out, try and find what they can find, and they come back with only 5 loaves and 2 fish. But Jesus then, we don't have any words there that say you go worried or concerned of what they bring back.

[16 : 48] Jesus there is what's happening. It doesn't come across so much in the English, but the word there where it says, let them sit down in groups in the green grass in verse 39, that is essentially sit down, recline, get ready to enjoy a meal.

It's just that Jesus is saying to them, you're all going to eat. Sit them down in groups and I will provide a feast for everyone.

And many of them make up parallel here with Moses providing bread in the wilderness, because we've read it's a desolate place, and we've read that there's really nothing there for them to eat, but it is a great provision made by the miraculous power of God through Jesus Christ, that he will feed his people and they will have a satisfactory amount for them to enjoy.

Moses himself, he was a shepherd figure to Israel. Jesus becomes a shepherd for the people in the passage.

And when you look in detail at the passage here, you remember that they crossed over on a boat, and it states here that they sat down also in green grass, which immediately sort of points us and reminds us of Psalm 23.

[18 : 23] The language that is used here, whether it's intentional or not, is a way that we have no want. It leads us to passage green to quiet waters. It teaches them in the path of righteousness.

And although difficulties may come, the shepherd is there. The shepherd is there to guide them and keep them. He'll furnish their tables, he'll provide for them in such a way that leaves them with a cup that is overflowing.

Jesus, the shepherd, provides for the people. And he provides them in such a way that you can see him in the Old Testament.

As the one who was spoken about, as one who would come, Jesus fulfills all these wee things, and there's many other more prophecies that you can find yourself about Jesus being a good shepherd.

But Jesus here, he looks out over the people at the beginning. He looked out over them and he saw them as sheep without a shepherd.

[19 : 33] So what does Jesus see when he looks out over us today? When he looks out over me, when he looks out over the community, when he looks out over that island.

Does he see us as sheep without a shepherd? Who does he see you as?

Do you have a shepherd? Is he your shepherd? Is he Prova-ation? That he died on the cross for you?

And even if we do, it's always worth coming back to remember what he has done. That's why I read the second passage today. As many times we feel like we are in the boat, just like the disciples.

As many times we look at our own situation and we feel like there's very little there for us. We feel like we don't have enough resources.

[20 : 39] We've only got enough to sustain ourselves and no one else. What has Jesus done in your life when you look back?

What's the most miraculous thing he's done for you? How has Jesus provided for you? How has Jesus loved you? Have you seen the compassion of the Lord in your life at work?

Have we forgotten what he has done for us? We've seen and heard of how the gospel influenced our communities in years gone by.

And we think that it will never happen again. We look at the situation we are in and we see we've only got very little here.

But what did Jesus say to the disciples when they were in the boat? Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the leaven of Herod.

[21 : 51] What he's saying there is stop trying to provide for things yourselves. Stop trying to reason your thing, reason it out by worldly means.

The Pharisees had their own laws and they would be accepted by all that they'd done and all that they obeyed the laws. And Herod had all his riches and he knew he could provide for himself.

Jesus said, you're looking at yourselves and you're thinking that you can provide for yourselves. He asked them to provide for the five thousand and they couldn't.

They're looking at this one loaf from the boat and they're moaning almost at each other and saying, who forgot to bring bread? Why do we only have one loaf?

Jesus is saying to them, why are you reasoning like that? Look at what I have done in your life.

[22 : 53] Look at what I have done in past generations where the churches were full of people. What was it they had?

I don't want to answer it necessarily. I want us to think about it. But one thing that's been bothering me.

I was listening to something. I spoke with Chalmers and other names that we are well known and it says that these men would pray for three hours a day at least.

Three hours a day. These guys had so much to do. They were praying for three hours a day. Where did they find the time for three hours a day?

You listen to stories from our own island from years ago.

[24 : 05] Where did they find the time to pray? Were they looking to themselves to provide?

No. Every day they were looking to God to provide for them. They didn't know how they could provide. They didn't know how to bring the gospel.

But they sought out God and prayer every morning. Not for 10 minutes or 15 minutes. They spent time with Jesus.

They came aside from the work that they had to do. They spent hours with Him. Jesus himself prayed through the watches of the night. The disciples were falling asleep.

I think if we want to provide for the people. If we want to see the multitudes being fed. If we want to see the people being saved.

[25 : 13] We turn to Jesus. The shepherd. The good shepherd. He feeds from the goodness of the bag that He has.

That He will greatly bless us if we do so I feel. That we do not look to ourselves. Or look to others.

Point the blame to others. Of why we do not have what we should have. That we would turn to Him and prayer. start at 10 minutes, you may continue to 20, you may reach half an hour, but I think the most important thing for us is that we look to the shepherd and what we spend time with the shepherd and we make time for the shepherd every day because he is a shepherd that has abundant compassion and provisions for us. If we look at him and turn to him, he sees us in our needs, he hears our prayers and he will answer us. Jesus loves us, Jesus died on the cross for us. Jesus sees you in your need whatever your need is, he will provide for us in a way that will abundantly satisfy us and exceed all our expectations if we come to him and learn from him and be taught by him. Do we remember what he has done for us? Do you not yet perceive or understand that your heart's not harmed? Have in eyes you do not see, have in ears you do not hear.

Do you not remember? Remember what the shepherd has done in our lives, remember what the shepherd can do for our community, our congregation and our nation. He'll draw us back to God and feed us from the riches of his grace. We pray these thoughts will be blessed to each of us.