

The Shepherd's Heart for Us

The calming of the storm, the Geresene demoniac, the woman with chronic bleeding, the raising of Jairus' daughter, the journey to his own town where he could work no miracles, the sending out of his disciples...

As we have followed Jesus through the early chapters of Mark's gospel, it has been a story of constant busyness – teaching, healing, casting out evil spirits, performing miracles. We have moved, Sunday by Sunday, through a whirlwind of activity. And the crowd have been growing. The multitudes of people are flocking around Jesus every hour of the day and everywhere He goes.

As we continue our study of Mark's Gospel today, we are confronted with a truly wonderful portion of Scripture. These five verses remind us that in the midst of all the activity and busyness, it was the people who were on Jesus' heart. These verses tell us without a doubt that Jesus cares about us. Listen for Jesus' shepherd heart as we read Mark 6:30-34:

30 Then the apostles gathered to Jesus and told Him all things, both what they had done and what they had taught.

31 And He said to them, "Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while." For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.

32 So they departed to a deserted place in the boat by themselves.

33 But the multitudes saw them departing, and many knew Him and ran there on foot from all the cities. They arrived before them and came together to Him.

34 And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things.

Jesus displays the heart of a caring shepherd. I want to point out two groups of people for whom the Lord cares. As I do, let Him teach you that He cares about you today.

I. Jesus Cares About His Laboring Servants (6:30-32)

A. Their Activity v. 30 –

Verse 30 picks up the rest of the story that Mark began back in verses 7-13. Remember that in verse 7, Jesus **"called the twelve to Himself, and began to send them out two by two, and gave them power over unclean spirits."**

Jesus sent the twelve disciples out on their first missionary field trip. Verses 12-13 tell us what they did, **"So they went out and preached that people should repent. And they cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick, and healed them."**

Now in verse 30, the twelve have returned from their mission. Their ministry had been an unqualified success and they return to the Lord and tell Him all about their ministry in the surrounding villages. They must have been excited about all they have seen God do through them. I can imagine them gathering around Him while they all try to talk at once. It was an exciting time in the lives of these men.

There really is no greater thrill in life than to serve the Lord when He is blessing that service. The Lord has saved us to serve Him. He redeemed us so that He

might work through us in this world. When Jesus saves us, He equips through His Holy Spirit us for special service in His kingdom work.

It is a wonderful thing to be busy for the Lord! To be allowed to serve Him is a blessing. And, there are no small tasks in His kingdom. Let me ask you, how is Jesus working through you in His church and in this world?

So they must have been excited to tell Jesus about all that God was doing. But they also may have been a little anxious too. Remember that in between Jesus sending out the twelve and them returning, in verses 14 through 29, John the Baptist has been murdered in prison by King Herod. He was killed for his fearless preaching of the truth. Some of Jesus' disciples had been followers of John. Now they were preaching the same message of repentance that John preached. What would happen to them?

B. His Advice v. 31-32 –

When Jesus hears their enthusiastic report, look at what He tells them. **"Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while."**

A lot of people would have suggested that it was time to seize the moment. The people were listening, the crowds were coming. In fact, Mark says in verse 31, **"there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat."** It might seem like the perfect time to send the disciples out again to go and preach and heal and increase the crowds. But that is not what Jesus does. Instead He calls the disciples away for a time of rest and refreshment.

The physical stress of ministry is enormous – When the disciples returned to Jesus, they found Him surrounded by crowds of needy people. The people were coming and going at such a frenzied rate that Jesus and His men did not even have time to eat a meal. That kind of constant stress would wear anyone out.

Jesus knew that His men needed to rest their bodies if they were going to be as effective as they could be in their work for Him. So, He takes them across the lake so that they could be reenergized.

There is a word here for the modern Christian as well. God did not design these bodies to non-stop. He never intended for us to run through this world with a cell phone constantly in our ear and a schedule so full of activity that no one could possibly get it all done. God expects us to take the time our bodies need to rest.

Think about this. Why do our calendars have days, months and years? Because God designed the world with these natural boundaries. People of all nations observe these. One revolution of the earth causes day and night. One lunar cycle marks a month. One revolution of the earth around the sun caused seasons and marks a year. But, why do we have a seven day week? There is no natural phenomenon that calls for a seven day week. The week was God's idea and God's gift to people. God decreed that man should work six days and rest one day. The seventh day of rest is a gift of grace! God knows our bodies are not designed to function all the time without rest. He set aside one day in the week because we need to rest!

There's a reason God has given us a steady cycle of day and night, work and rest. There's a reason he gave the command to "Remember the Sabbath day," the day of spiritual rest.

God wants us to serve Him, but He does not want us to kill ourselves in the process! We must take the time our bodies need to rest. Jesus knew what His apostles needed. They needed a quiet place so they could rest and refresh.

Our Shepherd knows that we need regular rest both physically and spiritually. It may seem like a small point to make, but it's actually a huge deal for us to get regular rest like that!

When we don't make time for regular rest or we think our schedule is too busy, what often happens? We focus more and more on just getting things done, trying to check things off our "to-do" list. "I've got to do this, then I've got to do that..." All our attention goes to what needs to be done and not to why we do it. We risk losing our sense of mission, our joy of service, our intimacy with the Lord.

You see, the Christian life – at home, at school, at work, at church – is a life of struggle against our own sinful weakness and the devil. The busy-ness of our time and its steady pressure tempt us to forego the rest we need.

Let's be real honest here. How many of you are actually sitting in your seat right now thinking about what you're going to do after church? Or how many of us are just somewhere else this morning instead of focusing on worshipping the One Who died to save our souls? I know what it's like to be in your place. I've spent countless Sunday mornings in the pew struggling to keep my mind focused on worship. The truth is, I HATE the fact that I struggle with this issue! It is not easy for me to lay aside all the distractions in my life, to clear my mind and focus on Jesus Christ. This is why it takes time to be holy; it takes time and practice to pray and worship.

Think about how often we read of Jesus going off to be alone, to pray. He goes off to a lonely place, a quiet place, a deserted place –to escape the crowds, to escape the busy-ness of ministry for a time. Jesus needed time out to be in prayer, to recharge His spiritual batteries. And so do His followers.

What does it mean for you and I today? We need to find our solitary place to be with God, a place where we can have uninterrupted communion, away from the busyness of the world. To grow as Christians and be effective in service to the Lord, we need daily time alone with God. Find a place of prayer away from the noise of the world around you. Find a time of prayer when you can be alone with Jesus. Take the tools of prayer, your Bible and maybe your hymn book. Create a daily pattern of prayer. There will be days when it comes naturally, when it flows from us – and there will be dry days, days when we feel like we are going through the motions. The advantage doing it daily is that it continues to sustain, feed, and nourish us on those "dry" days.

Come to a deserted place and rest awhile. Warren Wiersbe once said, "The ability to calm your soul and wait before God is one of the most difficult things in the Christian life. Our old nature is restless...the world around us is frantically in a hurry. But a restless heart usually leads to a reckless life." Psalm 131:2 says **"Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul."** When is the last time you did that?

II. Jesus Cares About Lost Sheep (6:33-34)

In verse 32 Jesus and His apostles make their escape across the lake from the crowds, **"So they departed to a deserted place in the boat by themselves."**

But they did not slip away unnoticed, verse 33 says, **"But the multitudes saw them departing, and many knew Him and ran there on foot from all the cities. They arrived before them and came together to Him."** The people saw them leaving and recognized that the boat carried Jesus. The people ran around the shore of the lake and were waiting on Him when He arrived on the other side.

It was about 4 miles across the lake by boat. On a windless day, it would have taken quite some time to make that trip. It was about ten miles around the shore of the lake. People running on foot would have made the trip a faster than the boat. This is just what happened that day. When Jesus and His men got near the shore, they saw that a large crowd was waiting to meet them. According to verse 44, this crowd numbered at least 5,000 men.

Most of us would have been upset that our plans for rest were interrupted by crowds of people. But Jesus didn't see the crowds as an interruption or a nuisance. Verse 34 tells us **"And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things."**

The word in English is that Jesus had **"compassion"** for them. In Greek, the word is far more forceful – it literally means that it overwhelms, starting in the gut. Maybe the closest idea we have to it is to say, "when Jesus saw them, His heart broke for them."

Jesus' heart breaks, He has a vicious gut level reaction to seeing the lostness of the people. When Jesus saw the people He was touched by their need and He was moved by a strong desire to meet their need.

A. The Reason For His Concern v. 33-34a – When Jesus looked at the people, He saw them as a flock of lost sheep. He was stirred by the vision of them as helpless lambs, with no one to care about them.

Oh, they had their religious leaders. But, those men did not care about the people. The Pharisees, the scribes and the Sadducees only cared about the people doing things their way. They wanted the people to march to their tune; obey their rules and keep lining their pockets. This kind of leadership is soundly condemned by God in Eze. 34:1-10. Jesus saw them as sheep without a shepherd.

How pitiful shepherdless sheep are! Shepherdless sheep become easy prey for wolves and other predators. They can't outrun them. They can't outfight them. And what wolf would be scared off by a bleating: baaa? Sheep are left torn and bloodied and dead without a shepherd. In addition, shepherdless sheep can overgraze a pasture eating the grass down to the dirt so that it can't grow back. If they survive the predators, how easily they could waste away starving to death without a shepherd! Shepherdless sheep can even die due to their own filth. In many places today sheep need their rears regularly sheared. It's called crutching. Otherwise manure sticks to the wool. Blowflies lay eggs there, and within a day the maggots begin burrowing into the sheep's skin. A fly-blown sheep is a sickening sight. How pitiful shepherdless sheep are!

So Jesus' heart goes out to these people, for they were like sheep without a shepherd. More important now than more rest, more important than a longer time for himself, was to shepherd these people. The Shepherd's heart goes out to them. He makes them his first concern, before himself.

And his shepherd's heart goes out to you, dear friend, to you. For without him we are shepherdless sheep. Without him we fall easy prey to that ravenous wolf named Satan. His teeth tear us to shreds with his lies and deceptions. We need our Shepherd! Without him we spiritually starve to death unable to find the green pastures that restore our soul. Like the dusty dirt of overgrazed land, the empty promises and senseless pleasures of this world cannot bring true nourishment or life. We need our Shepherd! Without him the filth of our own sin clings to us breeding the maggots of guilt that burrow deep into our conscience. We need our Shepherd!

B. The Reach Of His Concern v. 34a – As I read this verse I get the sense that while Jesus saw the crowd, He also saw much more. Jesus saw a huge group of people, but He also saw the individuals in that crowd. As He looked out at that throng of people, He saw every broken heart, every physical ailment, every emotional need, every spiritual problem; He saw it all! He saw the crippled child. He saw that abused wife. He saw the depressed father. He saw the rebellious teenager. Jesus looked at a crowd, but He saw the individual!

That encourages me today! I praise the Lord that we serve a God Who knows all things. Our God sees everything that happens in this universe, but He still has the ability to focus in on the individual. Friend, He cares about you and about the needs in your life. You can come to Him and find the help you need regardless of the problem you face.

He did not look just at that which was apparent on the surface, He was able to look at these people and see their deepest need! He loved them at the deepest level of His being; as a result, He was never impatient with them or offended by their needs.

How do we see people? We often base our evaluation of a person on what we see with our eyes or hear with our ears.

What we need to learn is to look past a person's exterior to see them as Jesus sees them.

C. The Response Of His Concern v. 34b – These people came to Jesus for help and He did not drive them away. Mark says **“So He began to teach them many things.”** There, in that out of the way location, Jesus spread the spiritual banquet table with a feast of eternal truth. He led those lost sheep into the green pastures of His perfect, soothing, filling Word. He caused them to lie down beside the still waters of His wonderful revelation.

Jesus gathered up the lost sheep that day and pointed them to God. He surely told them of the true way of salvation. He surely told them of the love of God for the lost. He surely told them of the hope, life, peace and joy that were all available in Him. He wanted to help and He had the power to help them. So, He reached out and helped them!

Do you remember the day the Good Shepherd found you wandering on the dark hills of sin? Do you remember when He lifted you out of your desperate condition, placed you on His shoulders and carried you to a place of peace, safety and blessing? Do you remember when He changed your life?

If you can, then you should rejoice in what He has done for you. If not, then you should come to Jesus and let Him change your life. He cares about you. He is able to help you. He will help you if you will come to Him by faith.

Conc: Where did this message find you today? Are you weary in the work of the Lord? Have you lost the joy of His salvation? Have the things of God become a drudgery to you? Are you just spiritually tired and worn out? Come to Jesus; let Him restore your soul. He knows how to put the spring back in your step. He knows how to give you joy once again. He cares about what you and what is happening in your life!

Are you a lost sheep today? Are you out there on the wild hills of sin, away from God and all alone? The Shepherd cares about you! He is here to rescue you today. In Luke 15:4 Jesus said, **"What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he loses one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the wilderness, and go after the one which is lost until he finds it? And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing."** In John 10:11 Jesus said, **"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep."** Come to Jesus today. Turn from your life of wandering and sin. Trust in Jesus to save you. If you will come to Him, He will take you into His fold and give you the forgiveness, the peace, the joy and the security you need.