

The Gospel of Mark

(Mid-Week Bible Study)

Week 9: The Compassion of the Shepherd King -- Mark 6:30–56

Picture the apostles returning. They have been gone, in twos, walking through villages they had never seen, preaching repentance, casting out demons, and seeing more in a few weeks than they could have imagined. They come back to Jesus exhausted and full of stories. He hears them out and then says, “Come away by yourselves to a desolate place and rest a while” (6:31). Mark adds the wry detail that they had not even had a moment to eat. They climb into a boat together to find a quiet place where Jesus can pour into them what they have just poured out into others.

But the people see where they are going. The crowd runs around the lake on foot, gets there ahead of them, and is already waiting on the shore when the boat arrives. Most leaders would be irritated. The day was supposed to be for rest. The team was tired. The schedule was set. Mark tells us what Jesus felt. “He had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd” (6:34). He teaches them. He feeds them. And when night falls, He sends the disciples back across the lake while He goes up the mountain alone to pray.

While they are rowing in the dark, the wind comes against them and they make almost no headway. About three in the morning, Jesus walks out to them across the water. They think they are seeing a ghost. He climbs into the boat. The wind dies. And Mark gives one of the most piercing sentences in his Gospel: “They were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened” (6:51–52). The disciples have just watched Jesus feed five thousand from five loaves and two fish, and they cannot yet see who is in their boat.

Mark 6:30–56 is a chapter about the deep, steady compassion of the Shepherd King and the way our hearts can be slow to read what He is doing in our lives. He is feeding His sheep. He is walking on the water that frightens us. He is healing whoever reaches for the edge of His robe. The question that walks home with us this week is whether we are paying attention. Whether the bread is still in our hands. Whether we recognize who is walking toward us across the storm.

Group Discussion: Mark places two scenes side by side: Jesus feeding the five thousand and Jesus walking on the water. Both reveal something about who He is. The chapter ends with the sober observation that the disciples “did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened” (6:52). Why is it so easy, even for genuine disciples, to witness God’s provision and care and still not really see Him, and what helps a Christian’s heart stay open and observant rather than slowly hardening over time?

Personal Reflection: When Jesus saw the crowd, His response was not annoyance at His interrupted day but compassion for sheep without a shepherd. Where in your own life right now do you most need to be reminded that the Lord's response to you, even at your most needy and demanding, is compassion, and how would your week change if that truth were the loudest voice in your soul?

Read Mark 6:30–56

Study Questions

1. When Jesus sees the crowd that has run around the lake ahead of Him, Mark says, "He had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd" (6:34). Connecting this scene with Ezekiel 34, Psalm 23, and John 10:11–18, what is Mark teaching us about the identity of Jesus as the long-promised Shepherd of God's people, and what does it mean for the daily life of believers to belong to this Shepherd?
2. Sheep without a shepherd are restless, wandering, vulnerable, and exhausted. Where in your own life or in the lives of people you love do you see the marks of shepherdless living, and where do you most need to allow Christ to actually shepherd you (in your decisions, your fears, your rhythms, your hopes) rather than running on your own?
3. When the disciples want to send the crowd away to find food, Jesus tells them, "You give them something to eat" (6:37), and then asks what they have. They report five loaves and two fish. What is Jesus teaching the disciples (and the church) about what He does with the small offering of His people when it is placed into His hands, and what does this scene illustrate about His sufficiency and our role as servants of His abundance?
4. Most of us measure our lives by what we do not have rather than by what Jesus has put in our hands. What are the "five loaves and two fish" of your own life right now, the small but real resources, gifts, relationships, and time that Christ could multiply if you would actually offer them to Him, and which one of those is He asking you to hand Him this week?
5. Mark's description of the feeding is striking: Jesus "took the five loaves and the two fish and looked up to heaven and said a blessing and broke the loaves and gave them to the disciples to set before the people" (6:41). The verbs (took, blessed, broke, gave) reappear at the Last Supper (Mark 14:22) and in the church's ongoing Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11:23–26). What is Mark hinting at by using this language here, and what does the connection teach us about the meaning of the Lord's Supper as the church's weekly meal with the risen Shepherd?
6. Acts 20:7 and 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 establish the New Testament pattern of the Lord's Supper being shared on the first day of every week. How does (or could) faithful weekly participation at the Lord's table shape your awareness of Christ's compassion, your dependence on His sufficiency, and your unity with the whole congregation, and what would it look like for you to come to that table this Sunday with a more attentive heart?
7. In verses 47–50, Jesus walks across the sea toward the disciples in the middle of the night and tells them, "Take heart; it is I. Do not be afraid." Mark also notes that Jesus "meant to

pass by them” (6:48), echoing Old Testament moments when God passes by His servants (Exodus 33:18–23; 1 Kings 19:11–13). What is Mark teaching about the identity of Jesus, and how does this scene reinforce the deity of Christ even as the disciples are slow to recognize Him?

8. The disciples were straining at the oars in the middle of the night, making almost no progress against the wind, when Jesus came to them across the water. Where in your life right now are you straining at the oars, exhausted and unable to make headway, and what would change in that situation if you genuinely received the truth that Christ is already on His way to you across the storm?
9. Mark closes the storm scene with one of the most sobering sentences in his Gospel: “They were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, but their hearts were hardened” (6:51–52). What is Mark teaching about the danger of a slowly hardening heart even among genuine disciples, why is forgetting what God has already done such a serious spiritual problem, and what does Scripture call us to do to keep our hearts soft and remembering (compare Hebrews 3:7–15; Deuteronomy 8:11–18; Psalm 103:1–5)?
10. When Jesus reaches Gennesaret, the people recognize Him immediately, carry the sick to Him in their beds, and “as many as touched it were made well” (6:53–56). As you close this chapter, who in your life is in need of being carried to Jesus, what specific way could you “bring” that person into His presence this week (by prayer, by invitation, by speaking of Him to them), and what is one practical step you can commit to taking?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Psalm 23, the LORD as Shepherd of His people; Ezekiel 34, God’s promise to come Himself and shepherd His sheep; John 10:11–18, Jesus as the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep; 1 Corinthians 11:23–26, the meaning and pattern of the Lord’s Supper; Hebrews 3:7–15, the call to keep one another from drifting into hardened hearts.