

THE SHEPHERD AND SHEPHERDLESS SHEEP

Mark 6:31-44

Intro: We come this morning to another miracle which is mentioned in all three of the Synoptic Gospels. Remember that *synoptic* means, as it applies to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, that they present their records of the earthly life and ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ, generally with the same material and somewhat in the same order. The Gospel of John is completely different as to order and most of its content, but in no way is it contradictory of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. However, this is one miracle, the feeding of the five thousand, that is included in the Gospel of John as well as in Matthew, Mark, and Luke. And it is the only miracle that is recorded in all four of the Gospels.

You will find it in Matthew 14:14-21; Luke 9:12-17; and John 6:4-13

Sometimes in recording the same event one of the Gospel writers will include a detail or so that is not in the others. For example, in Matthew 14:21 we are told that there were 5,000 men *plus* women and children, which could make the crowd closer to 10,000 people in all, and maybe more. In Luke 9:10 we are told that this miracle was performed in “a desert place belonging to the city called Bethsaida. This was located to the east of Capernaum along the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee. In the Gospel of John we are told that Andrew, Peter’s brother, who knew about the little boy who had a lunch containing five barley loaves and two small fish. But after telling the Lord about this, Andrew added, “But what are they among so many?” – as though he had been embarrassed even to mention such a small lunch. And John alone tells us that among the men who ate what the Lord provided for them, there was a conviction that our Lord was “that prophet that should come into the world” (John 6:14b). This probably means that they were seriously thinking that He was their Messiah, but not that He had come as the Redeemer, but that He had come to deliver them from Rome and to establish His kingdom over the whole world.

So when a miracle or a parable is repeated even just once among the four Gospels, we often get some added information by reading every record of a particular miracle so that we get a better idea of the whole situation.

Mark tells us that “the twelve “ (as they were called then) had just returned from the mission upon which the Lord had sent them, and they were

obviously very excited about the opportunities that they had had for ministering the Word. But, as I pointed out to you last week, they did not tell the Lord how many people they had reached, or how many people they had talked to who professed faith in Christ. Verse 30 of Mark 6 tells us,

30 And the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught.

They wanted the Lord to know that they had done what He told them to do, and that they had taught what He wanted them to teach. We are not given any details beyond that except that we can go back to verses 7 through 11 in this chapter to see what the Lord had told them to do. They were to go out trusting the Lord to supply their daily needs through the people who heard them. Notice how I have said that. I did not say that they were to trust the people to meet their needs, but they were to trust the Lord to meet their needs through the people who heard them. There is a big difference whether we are trusting the Lord, or trusting the people. They obviously had trusted the Lord. *But they had also taught what the Lord had been teaching them, and what they had heard Him teach time and time again. It is usually spoke of as preaching the kingdom of God.*

This means that they were preaching the Gospel. They were preaching salvation to the people, salvation from sin, salvation unto eternal life.

But they evidently came back very tired. Preaching the Gospel is strenuous work. There is always a feeling of apprehension as to how the message will be received. They didn't experience any great acceptance of the message, but the Lord was training them to preach the Word. They were to give the people not necessarily what they wanted to hear, but what they needed to hear. In those days following the ministry of John the Baptist there evidently was a lot of hope that the deliverance of Israel from Rome was soon to take place. But that was not the message of "the twelve." They faithfully proclaimed the message that the Lord had been preaching.

The Gospel is never popular among people who do not know the Lord. In our day preachers have found that people will come if you entertain them, if you make them laugh, and if you provided a lot of self-help for them. But the Word of God is not what people are looking for – *unless the Spirit of God is working in their hearts. But it is when people are hearing the Word that the Spirit of God works.*

However, the Lord did not send His disciples out to get results; He sent

them out to proclaim a message. They would rejoice when people were responsive to what they were preaching, but they had learned that the results were in the Lord's hands. They were to be faithful in preaching the Gospel.

This is primarily our mission today, too. The Word of God is "living and powerful." The Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. They told the Lord "what they had done, and what they had taught," and He didn't ask them about anything else.

Perhaps you remember that when the Lord sent out the seventy, "two and two," they "returned with joy, saying, Lord, even the demons are subject unto us through Thy Name" (Luke 10:17). But after the Lord told them that He was aware that great power had been manifested through their lives, yet He gave them this word of admonition:

20 Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20).

Imagine a group of Christians gathering together after a meeting in which they had seen any number of people profess faith in Christ, and instead of rejoicing in what had been accomplished through their ministry, they rejoiced instead that their own names were written in heaven. We have a lot to learn about what we are to do when God uses us in the lives of others. Seeing others saved ought to make us even more amazed, and more grateful to God, that He has saved us, that our names are "written in heaven."

But now picking up the record in Mark 6, look at the Lord's directions to "the twelve" in verse 31:

I. THE LORD'S CALL FOR THE TWELVE TO REST (Mark 6:31-32).

It is good to be devoted to the work of the Lord, but let us remember that our strength is not limitless. Years ago I heard someone say, or I read it some place, that *if we don't come apart occasionally to rest it is only a matter of time until we will come apart! They were so busy that they did not have time to eat. That might work for a time, but not for long.* And so they departed in a boat to go to a desert place where they could be together with the Lord to rest. But, as it turned out on this occasion, the only time they had for rest was while they were in the ship, or boat.

II. THE LORD AND “THE TWELVE” PURSUED BY THE PEOPLE (Mark 6:33-34).

The people saw them leave. Some knew where they were going. And so on foot the people got where the Lord and His disciple were going before they did.

How did the Lord respond? Did it make Him angry? Did He send them away? Did He tell His disciples to get back into the boat so they could go to a more remote place to get away from the people? No is the answer to all of those questions.

How did He respond? Verse 34 gives us our answer. Read it slowly and thoughtfully. (Read.) What does it mean that He “was moved with compassion on them”? He means that He yearned over them. He pitied them. He was sympathetic toward them and what they were doing. Why? And here we have one of the most graphic expressions found in Scripture to describe people who do not know the Lord. The Holy Spirit enable John Mark to tell us exactly how the Lord felt about those people. They were like “sheep not having a shepherd.”

Perhaps one reason people generally do not like the Bible and the message of the Bible, is because the Bible describes people as being like sheep, and even sheep without a shepherd.

Sheep are probably the most defenseless of any domesticated animal. They are at the mercy of a bear, or a wolf, or an eagle out of the sky, just to name a few of their enemies. They have a natural tendency to wander off. They need, desperately need, a shepherd to protect them, to care for them, to feed them, and to seek them when they wander away.

In Ezekiel 34 the Lord rebuked the spiritual leaders of Israel, their shepherds, or pastors, because they were not taking care of the flock of Israelites, which give us an idea of what it means for a sheep to be without a shepherd. Turn with me and let me read to you how the Lord indicted the leaders of Israel because they were not taking care of their flock, the people of Israel, and it will help us to see how much sheep need a shepherd. (Read Ezek. 34:4-6.)

Where did this expression come from, “sheep without a shepherd”? I found it several places in the Bible, but the first seems to be what Moses

said to the Lord when the time came for Moses to die, and for someone else to take over the leadership of that nation. Moses prayer to the Lord is found in Numbers 27, beginning with verse 15, after the Lord told him that he was going to die because he struck the rock instead of speaking to it as the Lord had told him to do. This is what we read beginning with Numbers 27:15:

15 And Moses spake unto the LORD, saying,

16 Let the LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation,

17 Which may go out before them, and which may go in before them, and which may lead them out, and which may bring them in; that the congregation of the LORD be not as sheep which have no shepherd (Num. 27:15-17).

Perhaps you remember that when Ahab sent to have Jehoshaphat go with him against the people of Ramoth-Gilead, that Jehoshaphat wanted to inquire first of the Lord. They inquired of four hundred prophets who told them to go against Ramoth-Gilead, and they all told them to go, that the Lord would give them victory. But Jehoshaphat still was not satisfied. And so he asked if there were not another prophet they could ask. Ahab said that there was one, Micaiah, but Ahab hated him because Micaiah always predicted evil against Ahab. Well, when they finally pinned Ahab down, he said this: "I did see all Israel scattered upon the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd" (2 Chron. 18:16). Therefore, Israel would be defenseless before Ramoth-Gilead.

How different was the confidence and faith of David as he wrote those words of the twenty-third Psalm: "The Lord is my Shepherd." The Lord Jesus said, "I am the good Shepherd" (John 10:11, 14). The writer of the book of Hebrews called our Lord, "That great Shepherd of the sheep" (Heb. 13:20). And the Apostle Peter said that our Lord was "the chief Shepherd" (1 Pet. 5:4).

The people who followed the Lord either needed Him to heal them of some disease, or they wanted to see Him perform miracles on others. Still others were fascinated by His teaching. But the truth of the Gospel had not reached their needy hearts. And the Lord knew far better than anyone else what it is to live in this world and not to have Him as their Shepherd.

So what did He do? Our text says that "He began to teach them many things" (Mark 6:34b). The Jews had their teachers, but they were not

teaching them that they were just sheep, helpless, lost sheep, facing not only certain death, but what is far worse, eternal death. And there is only one Shepherd Who can save us, and then keep us. And His Name, as most of you know, is the Lord Jesus Christ, “the good Shepherd Who giveth His life for the sheep.”

So the Lord as the Chief Shepherd, and because He is the Great Shepherd, able to save all who come unto Him, first sought to feed their souls, and then He fed their bodies. And the way He fed their bodies, is a great picture of how He feeds our souls. It all comes under the blessing of the Lord. He first gives to His disciples. Then His disciples give to the people. Then the people eat.

III. THE FEEDING OF THE MULTITUDE (Mark 6:35-44).

Most of you know the story of the feeding of the five thousand, and all He had to begin with was a lad’s lunch of five loaves and two fish. But that was all that He needed. The Apostle John tells us that the Lord asked Philip as they were considering what to do for those hungry people, “Whence shall we buy bread, that these may eat?” (John 6:5b). Here in our text in Mark 4 they admitted that they did not have the money to buy enough food to feed such a large crowd. So in every way they were dependent upon the Lord. This, too, was evidence that even the disciples were helpless, dependent sheep.

In closing let me read the account to you as the Holy Spirit revealed it to John Mark and then led Him to record it for us. **(Read Mark 6:35-44).**

Concl: I hope you believe this story because every detail of it is true.

The Lord took that lad’s lunch, looked up to heaven, praying to the Father, and then instead of moving among the people to give each one something to eat, He gave the food to His disciples, and they gave to the people, and every-one was fully satisfied – I think we can safely say, “All 10,000 plus of them!”

The big question is, How many in that great crowd really understood the teaching of the Lord? And the answer is, We don’t know! But the answer is the same about us here today, isn’t it? How many of us know that we are just like sheep. Maybe sheep get their name from us. We often sing, “Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love.” But even before we were saved, we were all inclined to wander

into sin, going farther and farther away from God. We made a lot of bad decisions. We took the way that we wanted to go, but we found that it didn't satisfy us like we thought it would. We subjected ourselves to all kinds of dangers in sin, and false teaching. Maybe some of you are still away from the great Shepherd. And you wouldn't know that you are just as helpless and defenseless before wolves and bears as any sheep or lamb would be.

When Paul was leaving the elders of Ephesus, the divinely appointed shepherds of the sheep, after telling them that they would never see him again, he said this to them:

28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

29 For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

30 Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

31 Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.

32 And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified (Acts 20:28-32).

May the Lord help all of us to remember that we are sheep, weak, prone to wander off, defenseless, careless, but by nature proud and inclined to think that we are always right, confident that we can take care of ourselves. And at the same time may those attitudes be undergoing a great change as through the Word and in our experiences we learn that we are not sufficient for ourselves nor in ourselves, but that we daily stand in need of that which only our Lord can be to us and do for us. If we can say, "The Lord is my SHEPHERD," then we can also say, "I shall not want," I shall not be in need because my sufficiency is the Lord.