

Mark 6:34

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things.

Analysis

And Jesus, when he came out, saw much people, and was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things. Jesus' response to the gathered crowds reveals His heart. 'When he came out' (ἐξελθὼν, exelthōn)—disembarking from the boat, Jesus encountered the crowd that outran Him. 'Saw much people' (εἶδεν πολὺν ὄχλον, eiden polyn ochlon) notes the multitude's size. 'Was moved with compassion' (ἐσπλαγχνίσθη, esplanchnisthē) uses strong Greek verb σπλαγχνίζομαι (splanchnizomai), literally 'felt it in the guts'—deep, visceral compassion. This wasn't mere sentiment but profound emotional response to their need.

'Because they were as sheep not having a shepherd' (ὅτι ἤσαν ὡς πρόβατα μὴ ἔχοντα ποιμένα, hoti ēsan hōs probata mē echonta poimena) echoes Old Testament imagery (Numbers 27:17; 1 Kings 22:17; Ezekiel 34:5). Israel's religious leaders had failed their shepherding responsibility, leaving people spiritually directionless and vulnerable. 'He began to teach them many things' (ῆρξατο διδάσκειν αὐτοὺς πολλά, ērxato didaskein autous polla)—despite needing rest, Jesus prioritized their spiritual need. This demonstrates Christ's shepherding heart: compassion producing action, recognizing that teaching God's word addresses humanity's deepest need. The scene establishes Jesus as the Good Shepherd who, unlike Israel's failed leaders, genuinely cares for and feeds His flock.

Historical Context

The shepherd-sheep metaphor was rich in Old Testament background. God was Israel's shepherd (Psalm 23; 80:1), and He appointed leaders as under-shepherds to care for His people. Prophets condemned Israel's leaders as false shepherds who neglected, exploited, and scattered the flock (Jeremiah 23:1-4; Ezekiel 34:1-10). By Jesus' time, religious leadership had become corrupted—Pharisees and Sadducees prioritized tradition, political power, and wealth above caring for people's souls. The masses were burdened with legalistic requirements yet starved for genuine spiritual nourishment. Jesus' compassion contrasted sharply with religious leaders' indifference or exploitation. The phrase 'began to teach them many things' indicates extended teaching session—hours of instruction. In the feeding miracle that follows, Jesus provides both spiritual food (teaching) and physical food (bread and fish), demonstrating He cares for whole persons. Early church applied this shepherd imagery to Christ and church leaders—pastors ('shepherds') must model Jesus' compassionate teaching ministry, feeding souls with God's word rather than exploiting the flock.

Related Passages

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Ephesians 2:8 — Salvation by grace through faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does Jesus' visceral compassion for spiritually neglected crowds challenge our own response to people in spiritual darkness and confusion?
2. What does Jesus' prioritizing teaching over His own rest reveal about the primacy of God's word in addressing humanity's deepest needs?

Interlinear Text

καὶ ἐξελθὼν εἶδεν ὁ Ἰησοῦς πολλά ὄχλον καὶ
And when he came out saw G3588 Jesus many things people And
G2532 G1831 G1492 G2424 G4183 G3793 G2532

ἐσπλαγχνίσθη ἐπ' αὐτοὺς ὅτι ἤσαν ὡς
was moved with compassion toward them because they were as
G4697 G1909 G846 G3754 G2258 G5613

πρόβατα μὴ ἔχοντα ποιμένα καὶ ἤρξατο διδάσκειν
sheep not having a shepherd And he began to teach
G4263 G3361 G2192 G4166 G2532 G756 G1321

αὐτοὺς πολλά
them many things
G846 G4183

Additional Cross-References

Matthew 9:36 (Parallel theme): But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.

Numbers 27:17 (Parallel theme): 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.

1 Kings 22:17 (Parallel theme): And he said, I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd: and the LORD said, These have no master: let them return every man to his house in peace.

Hebrews 4:15 (Parallel theme): For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

Jeremiah 50:6 (Parallel theme): My people hath been lost sheep: their shepherds have caused them to go astray, they have turned them away on the mountains: they have gone from mountain to hill, they have forgotten their restingplace.

Zechariah 10:2 (Parallel theme): For the idols have spoken vanity, and the diviners have seen a lie, and have told false dreams; they comfort in vain: therefore they went their way as a flock, they were troubled, because there was no shepherd.

Luke 9:11 (Parallel theme): And the people, when they knew it, followed him: and he received them, and spake unto them of the kingdom of God, and healed them that had need of healing.

2 Chronicles 18:16 (Parallel theme): Then he said, I did see all Israel scattered upon the mountains, as sheep that have no shepherd: and the LORD said, These have no master; let them return therefore every man to his house in peace.

Matthew 14:14 (References Jesus): And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick.

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