



The Good Shepherd

Key idea:

Jesus is the Good Shepherd who provides physical and spiritual rest, nourishment, and care, even in the wilderness.

Key text:

Mark 6:30-44

The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught. ³¹ Then, because so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat, he said to them, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.” ³² So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. ³³ But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. ³⁴ When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So he began teaching them many things. ³⁵ By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him. “This is a remote place,” they said, “and it’s already very late. ³⁶ Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat.” ³⁷ But he answered, “You give them something to eat.” They said to him, “That would take eight months of a man’s wages! Are we to go and spend that much on bread and give it to them to eat?” ³⁸ “How many loaves do you have?” he asked. “Go and see.” When they found out, they said, “Five — and two fish.” ³⁹ Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. ⁴⁰ So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties. ⁴¹ Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to set before the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. ⁴² They all ate and were satisfied, ⁴³ and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. ⁴⁴ The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand. Mark 6:30–44

Key points:

1. Mark draws upon Old Testament phrases and imagery to show us that Jesus is the Good Shepherd throughout this story, caring for His disciples and the crowds.
2. As the Good Shepherd, Jesus gives His people physical and spiritual rest so that they do not become overwhelmed and burn out and fall into sin or despair.

3. Jesus sees the crowds with compassion, for they are like sheep without a Shepherd. This phrase draws upon two key Old Testament stories where this phrase is also used:
 - a. In Numbers 27:15-18, Moses prays for God to raise up a leader after him so that the people will not be in the wilderness like sheep without a shepherd. God answers this prayer by raising up Joshua (the Hebrew form of the name Jesus).
 - b. In Ezekiel 34, God chastises the shepherds who had not cared for the flock but only themselves, which caused the people to be sent into the wilderness of exile like a scattered flock without a shepherd. God said He Himself would Shepherd the flock and would raise up a new David - the Messiah - to care for the flock.
4. Jesus cares for the scattered flock by giving them the spiritual food of the Word and then feeding them physically in the midst of the wilderness.
5. The feeding of the 5,000 men is a foreshadow of the Last Supper and the Lord's Table where Jesus the True and Living Bread and Vine, feeds and nourishes His people with the Bread and Cup of Life.

Questions for discussion/application:

1. What part of Sunday's teaching stood out most to you? Why?
2. What surprised me most as we looked at this familiar story of Jesus feeding the 5,000? Were there things that I had never noticed before?
3. What clues does Mark use to tell us that he wants us to see Jesus as the Good Shepherd through this story?
4. The Greek word ἔρημος (erēmos) is very important in this story. At various times the word can refer to a lonely, quiet, or solitary place, or it can refer to a barren wasteland and wilderness. How does each of these meanings help me understand this story better?
5. Am I receiving Jesus' gift of physical and spiritual rest? How often do I have a place and time in a quiet, lonely place of solitude and rest? How can I create a regular practice to experience this in my own life? In my family life?
6. Why does Mark mention that Jesus had the people sit on the "green grass"? Why does he give this seemingly trivial bit of information?

7. How does this story help me when I am experiencing a time in a place that seems like a barren wasteland?
8. Why does Jesus make the disciples find out how many loaves of bread they have? What does this help readers understand? What did it teach the disciples?
9. How does this story remind me of the manna in the wilderness? What is similar and what is different?
10. How does this story point me to the Lord's Supper? How can it help me as I come to the Lord's Table each week?
11. This story is one of only a few stories from the life of Jesus recorded in all four Gospels. Read the account in John 6. How does this teaching of Jesus in John 6 help me understand this passage?
12. Who can I reach out to this week to share the Gospel or strengthen their faith?

For Further Study:

[The Lord Who Feeds His People](#) - a teaching on this story as told in John 6.

[The Priorities and Practices of the King](#) - a teaching from earlier in this series on Mark where we learn more about the need for withdrawing to the quiet, lonely place to be with Jesus.