

Seeking the Lost

MARK 6:31-34

Baxter T. Exum (#1266)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
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For just a few moments, I would invite you to think with me about attending a huge gathering with many, many people. Of course, for us here in Madison, that is not very hard to imagine! We always seem to have something going on. We come together for food, we come together to celebrate, we come together for a wide variety of athletic contests, and this weekend, of course, many have come together for brats. But for just a moment, I would ask that you try to imagine that all of these thousands of people have come together, not for brats, but to see YOU in particular. And try to imagine that wherever you go, people would recognize who you are, they would all tell their friends, and thousands upon thousands of people would come to see YOU. Imagine trying to go shopping, imagine trying to do just about anything with thousands of people constantly following you around. I would imagine that that would get old rather quickly.

With this picture in mind, I would invite you to turn with me to Mark 6 as we find huge crowds of people following Jesus around everywhere he goes (p. 1569). I want us to think about how stressful that must have been. Imagine leaving BratFest walking on the bike trail along John Nolen Drive, and imagine and having all of those thousands of people following you around Lake Monona. Imagine having no privacy whatsoever. In my mind, that is just about the closest I can come to trying to imagine what Jesus was going through. Well, in the passage we are about to consider this morning, we find that Jesus and the apostles actually get on a boat, and they do this simply to get away from the crowds for a few moments. Now imagine getting in a boat at Olin Park, and imagine watching as all of those thousands of people start running along the shore trying to figure out where you might land – men, women, children, in all shapes and sizes, from all walks of life – all of them running along the lakeshore, trying to figure out where YOU might go next. That is the picture that Mark paints for us in Mark 6:30-34. This morning, then, I want us to focus on this passage, and I want us to learn something based on how Jesus treated all of these huge crowds of people. When Jesus looked at those crowds, what did he see? What did he feel? What did he think? What did he actually do? And what can we learn from all of this? Notice, please, Mark 6:30-34,

³⁰ The apostles gathered together with Jesus; and they reported to Him all that they had done and taught. ³¹ And He said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a secluded place and rest a while." (For there were many people coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.) ³² They went away in the boat to a secluded place by themselves. ³³ The people saw them going, and many recognized them and ran there together on foot from all the cities, and

got there ahead of them.* ³⁴ *When Jesus went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He felt compassion for them because they were like sheep without a shepherd; and He began to teach them many things.

Again, as we look at this paragraph, I want us to learn something from how Jesus treated people, even how he thought about people. The purpose of this lesson is to give us a little bit of encouragement when it comes to inviting somebody to worship with us next Sunday. When we talked about this in our family last week, one of our kids said, “But isn’t every Sunday friend and family day?” And of course, the answer is “Yes!” Next Sunday, though, we want to study a lesson that introduces the concept of restoring simple New Testament Christianity, and our goal is to use next Sunday as a special opportunity for giving our friends and family a place to jump in.

- I. **So, as we look back at this passage, and as we begin this morning, I want to ask ourselves the question: When we look at the world around us, when we look at our friends, and families, and coworkers, and neighbors, DO WE SEE WHAT JESUS SEES?**

What did Jesus see here? I would suggest that when Jesus looked out at those crowds, he saw **PEOPLE** he saw **SOULS**. He did not see them as interruptions. He did not see them as adversaries. He did not see them as distractions. Instead, Jesus saw potential. He saw thousands of individuals all made in the image of God. He saw thousands of people who needed his personal attention.

Now, as we try to apply this to our own situation, we might think, “But I don’t have thousands of people following me wherever I go!” Think for a moment, though, about the number of people we actually know today. And I want us to think about this in terms of possibilities for sharing the gospel. How many people do we know personally? How many people do we know by name? And even if not by name, how many people would we recognize if we met them out in this community? How many people do we know at work? How many people do you know at school – teachers, students, support staff? How about in our neighborhood? How about in the community – doctors, bank tellers, babysitters, waiters and waitresses? What about in our own families – grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, cousins? How many friends do we have on Facebook? How many people do we have in our email contact lists? How many contacts do we have in our phones? With our society as mobile as it is, and with technology the way it is, I might suggest that many of us actually know hundreds upon hundreds, if not thousands of people.

And as we think about those thousands of people we know, we go back to the Bible, and we find examples of people way back then starting by sharing the gospel with the people they knew personally. We think of Andrew who told his own brother Peter about Jesus in John 1. He went to his brother! We think of the woman at the well who went and got her neighbors in John 4. We think of the demon-possessed man who went and spoke to his own family and then his neighbors in Luke 8. We think of Matthew the tax collector who threw a big party for his co-workers in Matthew 9. Matthew did that so that he could introduce his co-workers to the Lord. In Bible times, people shared the good news, first of all, to the people they already knew. And when we think about it, that is usually the way it works today. We could go around this room and ask each person here how they first found out about the Lord’s church, and I know without a doubt – most of you would be able to say that you first learned about the Lord’s church through close friend or a member of your family, maybe even a coworker. Chances are, you did not first see an ad in the newspaper or an ad in the Yellow Pages, you did not just happen to wake up one day and stumble upon our website; instead, you most likely heard about Jesus from a person, and usually that person was most likely somebody you already knew. And I know there

are exceptions, but generally speaking, most of us here this morning first heard about the Lord's church from a close friend or relative.

The point here is: Even in a large crowd, Jesus saw PEOPLE. People matter to Jesus. He worshiped with them in their synagogues. He attended their weddings. He got on their fishing boats. He laughed. He cried. He got involved. He saw each person as a soul. And so the question is: Do we see people in the same way? We know thousands of people. Do we see them as Jesus sees them?

II. **As we look back at our text, I would also ask: When we see the people around us, DO WE FEEL WHAT JESUS FEELS?**

Notice in verse 34, Mark tells us that Jesus ***"felt compassion for them."*** And so the question is: Do we really feel compassion for the people around us? When we see people, are we moved? As I understand it, the word "compassion" here literally refers to being "moved in the inward parts," to be moved in the "guts," we might say. When we experience something that makes us very emotional, sometimes we might say that it feels like we have been "punched in the gut." That is the feeling Jesus had here. The Lord, then, saw these people and he was deeply moved. He felt something. He didn't just see people and look away, but he saw people and he felt something. He saw people, and his heart broke. He saw people and he felt it.

Do we really understand what the Bible teaches concerning those who do not obey the gospel? In 2 Thessalonians 1, the apostle Paul speaks of a time ***"...when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power."*** Do we understand what that really means for the people we know and love? Do we understand what that really means for the thousands that each of us know by name? Do we understand what that means for the letter carrier, for the waitress, for the guy next door? Do we understand what that means for own parents and children? And if we understand, do we really care? Jesus cared. He was moved with ***"compassion."*** Do we feel what Jesus feels?

III. **Let's go back to our text and ask another question, and that is: DO WE SEE PEOPLE LIKE JESUS SEES PEOPLE?**

In verse 34, we find the reason why Jesus felt compassion as Mark tells us that that Jesus saw these people as ***"sheep without a shepherd."*** Most of us do not have very much personal experience with sheep. As I have explained before, I have helped corral sheep before, and I would say that the sheep I worked with on that one occasion were not exactly the calm animals that I had imagined. I learned that day that sheep are able to jump rather high. But generally speaking, sheep need somebody to care for them. Sheep have no real sense of direction – eating and eating, and sometimes even eating themselves right off the edge of a cliff. Not only that, but out in the wilderness, we might say that sheep would be rather low on the food chain. Sheep are easy prey for wolves and coyotes and other predators. Sheep, of course, do not have claws, or fangs. Generally speaking, sheep are not very scary. I want you to think for just a moment about the noise that sheep make. We all know what sheep say, right? I want you to think about that noise, and I want you to imagine making that noise so that it sounds scary. Try making that noise in a way that might scare off a predator. I can't picture that in my head. We know, then, that sheep need to be cared for. They need to be protected. They need to be trimmed from time to time.

On the wall up here I have put a picture of Shrek the Sheep, a picture that was taken just a few years ago. Apparently, Shrek somehow managed to avoid having his wool harvested for a period of 6 years. Whenever they would come to shear the sheep, Shrek would go run and hide in the mountains of New Zealand. And when they finally caught him, this is what he looked like – six years with no trim. By the way, when they finally caught this guy, they shaved off 60 pounds of wool. Now I want you to imagine Shrek the Sheep being all alone out in the middle of nowhere. Imagine trying to run away from a wolf like that. Imagine trying to cross a small stream. Imagine falling over. I don't want to get too graphic, but I would invite you to imagine looking at Shrek from the other end. Imagine if we could turn this guy around. Veterinarians tell us that things can get rather hazardous back there if sheep are not trimmed. It seems, then, that sheep were designed to need shepherds.

So, Jesus sees these people chasing him around the shore of the Sea of Galilee, and this is what he sees – sheep without a shepherd. Instead of being fed spiritually in their own synagogues, these people were out there desperately looking for some kind of spiritual care. They were not getting it back home, so they had to helplessly wander, desperately looking for whatever care they could find on their own. They were so desperate for truth that they would run from village to village trying to find it.

With this in mind, I would ask: Don't we know people like this today? Don't we see people all around us just drifting in life, bouncing back and forth from one bizarre theory to the next, constantly falling for the latest religious fad, going from church to church desperately looking for a word from God that they can never find? Don't we all have friends who so are caught up in sin that we could almost compare them to a sheep covered in 60 pounds of wool? Don't we all have friends who have latched on in desperation to some kind of bizarre doctrine or another? Don't we all have friends who are starving for some kind of word from God? Our challenge this week, then, is to see people as Jesus sees people, not as enemies, but as sheep without a shepherd. We certainly don't need to be rude about it, we certainly don't need to ignore the problem, but our mission is to very gently turn our friends and families and neighbors back to Jesus, guiding them back to Jesus as the Good Shepherd.

IV. As we go back to the passage in Mark 6, I would ask one final question this morning, and that is: Do we do what Jesus does in this passage?

And when it comes to what Jesus actually does here, we find in verse 34 that Jesus ***“began to teach them many things.”*** And yes, we know that Jesus also healed the sick and fed those who are hungry – we will see this in the next few verses – but the main idea here is that Jesus gave these people what they really needed. At this point, more than anything else, these people needed the word of God. They needed some good news. They needed the gospel. When Jesus saw a crowd of people like sheep without a shepherd, he taught them many things. They needed instruction.

And so the question is: Do we do the same? Sometimes people might think, “Well, if I just live my life as a good example, that right there is enough. I will just be a good person, and my friends can learn through that.” Notice, though, even with Jesus, his example was very important, but even the Lord's example was not enough. Even Jesus had to say something. Even Jesus had to teach. In John 6:63, in fact, Jesus said, ***“...the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.”*** The example is important, but the words bring life. At some point, then, we actually need to speak up. At some point, we actually need to say something. Words have to come out! How do we get that conversation started? Some of you have asked, “How do we do it? How do we teach people?” I would make several suggestions:

- First of all, knowing that every situation is different, knowing that we are closer to some people than others, we might just want to say to our friend, “Hey, how are you doing spiritually?” That right there is often enough to open the door with some people.
- Or maybe somebody knows we study the Bible, so they come to us with a question. At that point, we answer the question right there on the spot. Or maybe, if it’s something we don’t know, we can offer to look into that question on our own and get back to them.
- Or maybe we have a friend who studies the Bible. We could say, “You know, we have a series of Bible study courses at our church that you can do completely through the mail. We even pay the postage. You do it at your own pace. Just put your name and address on this card, and we’ll send you the first lesson. And we don’t harass you, either. You just study at your own pace.” We might also direct somebody to the church website or the Facebook page.
- Or maybe we could invite a friend to Bible class with us. I put a good article about this in the cubbyholes this morning. We need to be specific, “Hey, our church is having a friend and family day next Sunday! Can I come by and pick you up at 9 o’clock?”
- Or maybe a good friend is having trouble – health concerns, trouble with children, the stress of caring for an elderly parent, any number of things, “Would it be alright if we pray about that together? Would it be alright if we look at what the Bible says about this? We are studying this in our Wednesday night Bible class. Would you like to join us this week?”
- Or maybe we could post a link to the church’s website or Facebook page on our own Facebook page.
- Or maybe we could in some way steer a conversation back toward what really matters in this life.
- Or maybe we could tell our friends about the clothing give-away coming up in August. This isn’t just for the poor. Yes, those without clothing can come and get it. But this event is also for the benefit of those who donate.
- Or maybe we could invite a friend to the Memorial Day BBQ.

There are so many things we could say, but the point is: It is important to be a good example, but at some point we actually need to say something. At some point we actually need speak up and teach, just as Jesus did.

Not long ago, LifeWay Research conducted a study of 15,000 people across the United States trying to determine which of many approaches would be the best-received as churches try to reach out into the community. They asked those who were not a part of any church concerning which method they might be most likely to accept – website, newspaper ad, door-knocking, Facebook, all of these various methods of outreach. And by far (at 63%), those on the outside said that they would be most receptive if a friend or family member would give them a personal invitation. 63% said that if a friend would simply invite them to worship they would seriously consider it. So, as we go out this week, the way I see it is: We have a 37% chance of just getting shot down outright! But on the other hand, we have a 63% chance that a friend or loved one might at least be willing to consider it.

Conclusion:

As we close today’s lesson, as we think about how Jesus thought about people, as we think about how Jesus reached out and taught people, I’d like to close by sharing an interesting story from a friend of mine, J.M., who (as I remember it) was sent out as a missionary to Joao Pessoa [zhwauⁿ-pe-’sō-ə], Brazil, and this was on the very first Sunday that Keola and I ever visited the church down in Goodlettsville, Tennessee – that is when he was first sent out as a missionary. Earlier this year, in one of his regular reports, he referred back to the recent baptism of a young man by the name of M. who works at one of the largest and most successful Chinese

restaurants in this city of nearly a million people. Well, M. (as a new Christian) was looking for a way to reach out to the other 120 people who work along with him at this restaurant. They tried starting a Sunday service nearby, and several visited. They tried visiting in homes, and some were able to do that. They tried Bible studies as the cooks and servers were on their afternoon lunch break, but the coworkers were too tired on their break. So, after dabbling in some of these methods for a while, they tried starting a Bible study at midnight, as the restaurant would close. And amazingly, they found that this is when the study worked best. After work at midnight, everybody was wide-awake and eager to study. They started on the sidewalk out in front of the restaurant. They were a little nervous, since this city is the 9th most dangerous place to live in the world. One of the other missionaries was actually held up at gunpoint a year or so ago, about three blocks over. The studies, though, went well. They changed locations a time or two. My friend J. says that he actually fell asleep several times as he was teaching the class, but that M. (the new Christian) would pick up right where he dozed off. Over time, the workers at the restaurant came to see M. almost as a counselor, coming to him with all of their troubles, and M. would take them back to the Scriptures. Over time, some were baptized. All through this, the owner of the restaurant got deeper and deeper in debt, eventually getting harassed by loan sharks. He tried to escape with alcohol and prostitution, but it got so bad that the owner came very close to taking his own life. He had the gun, he called his mother to say goodbye, he was about to pull the trigger when he heard a voice telling him to put the gun away and go home. So he did. That day, representatives from another bank he didn't know showed up out of nowhere and offered to help. Not long after that, a stranger (a man eating at the restaurant) asked to pray with him about what he was going through. They prayed together, and eventually the owner of the restaurant started studying with M. – every night until 3 or 4 in the morning. The owner stopped drinking, stopped the partying, started spending more time with his wife and family, and then (as you can see in the picture on the wall back here), the owner started making his own restaurant available for the studies. The attendance at these Thursday evening studies right now is around 30. And as I said earlier, several have been baptized. I would just emphasize: This is not something that brother J.M. orchestrated. He did not head down to Brazil more than 20 years ago with the plan of converting an entire Chinese restaurant. Instead, this is something that started when somebody taught the gospel to M. who then went to work and said something to his friends and to his coworkers.

As we close, then, I would ask: Is there anybody at your work, or in your family, or in your neighborhood, who needs to hear the good news? Is there anybody in your life right now who you would like to see obey the gospel? Do we see people like Jesus sees people? Do we see people as souls? Do we feel compassion like Jesus feels compassion? Do we see our loved ones as being like sheep without a shepherd? Do we teach people like Jesus taught?

The good news is that Jesus died for our sins. He was buried and was raised up on the third day. We obey the good news by doing the same. We follow his example. We die. We die to sin. We turn away from sin. We allow ourselves to be buried in water for the forgiveness of our sins. We are then raised up to live the Christian life. Our friends and neighbors need to hear this. If you have any questions, please ask. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's all stand and sing together...

To comment on this lesson: foullakeschurch@gmail.com