

The title of this morning's sermon is, "*Our Compassionate Savior.*"

On Sunday mornings we're working our way through Luke's Gospel verse-by-verse and we find ourselves at **Luke 9:10**. We're starting one of the most familiar accounts in all of Scripture: the feeding of the 5,000.

Before we begin, let me make some introductory points...

First, this miracle is very significant. It's the only miracle – aside from the Resurrection itself – that's recorded in all the Gospels. I've told you before that God is repetitive when He wants to make sure we don't miss something, and apparently He wants to make sure we don't miss this miracle.

Since the miracle is recorded in four Gospels we can use the parallel accounts to add details that aren't in Luke. This morning we're going to be looking at Mark's Gospel too, and by pulling in these verses, I'll be able to give you a much clearer picture of what took place.

Second, one reason this miracle might be so significant, is qualitatively – or numerically – speaking, it was the most dramatic. There are plenty of other miracles Jesus performed that affected one person or a few people, but w/ this miracle, thousands were affected. And to be clear, it's very misleading to call this, "The Feeding of the Five Thousand."

Briefly look at **verse 14**...

14 For there were about FIVE THOUSAND MEN.

This doesn't mean 5,000 people. It means 5,000 men, which means there were also some number of women and children. The parallel account in **Matt 14:21** makes this clearer: **those who ate were about five thousand men, BESIDES WOMEN AND CHILDREN.**

We don't know exactly how many people Jesus fed, but if each man had a wife and only two children, you're looking at around 20,000 people. So I'm going to refer to this as the Feeding of the 20,000. Just to give you an idea how many people this is, I think we have around 300 people for service, so you'd have 67 of our services being fed.

The third introductory point...

You need to know Jesus is at the height of His popularity, and let me remind you how this happened...

He's been performing amazing miracles:

- The sick are completely healed
- Lepers are cleansed
- Storms are calmed
- Demons are expelled
- Even the dead are brought back to life

You can imagine the fame of Someone able to do all this would really spread.

Then, **Luke 9:1** says [Jesus] called His twelve disciples together and **GAVE THEM POWER AND AUTHORITY OVER ALL DEMONS, AND TO CURE DISEASES.**

Jesus gave the Apostles some of the power and authority He had and then they went out in groups of two:

- Jesus essentially cloned Himself six times.
- They were preaching Christ and doing many of the same miracles He did
- This created even greater interest in Jesus, which is one of the main points of the previous verses.

Jesus' fame spread so much, it even reached the highest levels of government in the land. Briefly look at **Luke 9:7**...

Luke 9:7 Now Herod the tetrarch heard about all that was happening

Herod is called a king in Matthew's Gospel, and when the king hears about everything you're doing, you know you're a pretty big deal.

So Jesus was at the height of His popularity. He was never...

- More pursued...
- More sought after...
- People were never more infatuated with Him.

And here's why I'm telling you this...

It's at this exact moment that Jesus wants to go away w/ the Apostles so they can have some privacy and rest after their exhausting missionary trip. Look at **verse 10...**

Luke 9:10 On their return the apostles told him all that they had done (this means all that they had done when they were sent out). **And he took them and withdrew apart to a town called Bethsaida.**

The Apostles just returned from their missionary trip where they were traveling from area-to-area, house-to-house, preaching and healing all day. How do you think they were feeling? Exhausted! You can guess that from Luke's account, but the parallel account in Mark's Gospel makes it even clearer. Please turn to **Mark 6:31...**

Mark 6:31 And he said to them, "Come away by yourselves to a desolate place AND REST A WHILE." For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure EVEN TO EAT.

You know you're busy when you don't even have time to eat.

When Jesus sent out the Apostles at the beginning of the chapter, I told you He was carrying on His ministry through them. As a result there were lots of similarities between Jesus and the Twelve:

- Carrying on a ministry that reflected the ministry of Jesus Himself would've been exhausting.
- Just like there were times Jesus had to get away from the crowds to rest, now the Apostles had to get away from the crowds to rest.
- **Mark 3:20** says there were times Jesus didn't have time to eat, and now it says the Apostles were so busy they **[didn't have time] to eat.**

We can imagine that if Jesus was God in the flesh and He became tired and needed to rest, the Apostles definitely would've become tired and needed to rest. It's encouraging to me that Jesus made a point of resting during His earthly ministry, and He made a point of making sure the Apostles were able to rest during their earthly ministries.

One thing that stuck out to me is the rest for the Apostles seemed to involve fellowship with each other:

- Jesus wanted to get them away from the crowds, but He didn't want to get them away from each other.

- Hopefully God has some people in your life and spending time with them is restful for you.
- If you don't have any friends like that, I would encourage you to both look for some and pray God provides with you some.

But interestingly, even though Jesus said He wanted to get the Apostles some rest from the crowds, look at **Mark 6:32...**

Mark 6:32 And they went away in the boat to a desolate place by themselves. 33 Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they ran there on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.

Although Mark says they went **to a desolate place**, Luke said they went **to a town called Beshsaida. Bethsaida** was several miles north of the Sea of Galilee and to the east of where the Jordan River enters the lake.

Verse 33 says the people **recognized THEM**, and it says **them** b/c when Jesus sent out the Apostles, they performed enough miracles that it made them famous too.

So picture what this scene looked like...

- Jesus and the Apostles head across the lake by **boat** for some peace and quiet...
- As soon as the people from the Capernaum side of the lake saw that Jesus was leaving them, it actually says they **ran** around the northern edge of the lake **from all the towns** and even **got [to the location] ahead of [Jesus and the Apostles]**.
- Jesus and the apostles reached their location by boat, but these crowds travelled great distances on foot.

So Jesus tried to get away to a private, restful place w/ the Apostles, but before they can even get out of the boat, there's an overzealous, boisterous crowd filled with demanding people meeting them on the shore.

Now let's think about what's going to happen...

Since Jesus wanted the Apostles to be able to rest, He's going to send the crowds away as soon as He sees them, right?

You don't have to turn back to Luke's Gospel, but listen to what happened...

Luke 9:11 When the crowds learned it, they followed [Jesus, and He said, “We came here to find some peace and quiet, but you never leave us alone. Please go home. My Apostles are exhausted. I’m God in the flesh, but you people are enough to wear me out too. We can’t even eat. Come back some other time.”]

No, that’s what I would’ve been tempted to say. Instead...

Luke 9:11 When the crowds learned it (learned they had left the area), they followed [Jesus], and **HE WELCOMED THEM** and spoke to them of the kingdom of God and cured those who had need of healing.

It actually says **He welcomed them**:

- It’s not that they cornered Jesus and He couldn’t get away.
- Instead, Jesus received them favorably or positively.

He welcomed those who interrupted the rest He wanted for the Apostles.

So there’s one obvious question...

If Jesus wanted the Apostles to get some rest, why did He **welcome** all these people instead of sending them away?

The answer is in **Mark 6:34**...

Mark 6:34 When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and **HE HAD COMPASSION ON THEM**, because they were like sheep without a shepherd. **And he began to teach them many things.**

Being one of the Twelve Apostles wasn’t easy:

- Right when they thought they were finally going to get some rest after their exhausting missionary journey, they see their Master welcome this huge crowd.
- They must’ve thought, “*Oh great. Here we go again.*”

You almost have to feel bad for them a little.

One irony I thought of w/ this account is Jesus looks very compassionate toward the crowd, but He almost looks like He lacks compassion for His worn-out Apostles.

The truth is, Jesus wasn't unsympathetic to His Apostles. He knew they needed rest, and He still wanted them to get some rest. But...

- The needs of the multitudes touched His heart.
- The spiritual needs of the crowd outweighed the physical needs of His Apostles.

The Greek word for "compassion" is *splagchnizomai* (pr: splock-need-zuh-muh), and it literally means, "TO HAVE ONE'S INNER BEING STIRRED." It's stronger than sympathy. The word is used 12 times in the gospels, and 8 of those times it references Jesus. Here are a few examples:

- When He looked at people w/ leprosy: **Mark 1:41 Then Jesus, MOVED WITH COMPASSION, stretched out His hand and touched him, and said to him, "I am willing; be cleansed."**
- When He looked at people who lost children, like the widow at Nain: **Luke 7:13 When the Lord saw her, HE HAD COMPASSION ON HER and said to her, "Do not weep."**
- When He looked at people with difficult afflictions, like the two blind men it says: **Matt 20:34 So JESUS HAD COMPASSION and touched their eyes. And immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed Him**

Each of these times Jesus felt compassion it led Him to act. And this brings us to Lesson 1...

LESSON 1: COMPASSION SHOULD MOVE US TO ACT.

Jerry Bridges said, "*Compassion is the deep feeling of sharing in the suffering of another and the desire to relieve that suffering.*"

Probably Jesus' premier teaching on experiencing compassion and desiring to relieve the suffering of others is the Parable of the Good Samaritan...

The background to this is a lawyer was trying to figure out who to help, but to be more accurate it seems like he's probably trying to figure out who he doesn't have to help. In response to his question, Jesus teaches this instructive parable. Here's part of it...

Luke 10:33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And WHEN HE SAW HIM, HE HAD COMPASSION.

This is the same language that's used with Jesus...

- When He saw the crowds...
- Or when He saw the leper...
- Or when He saw the widow at Nain...
- Or when He saw the blind men...

He had compassion...and that's what moved Him to act. Compassion is what moved the Samaritan to act, and compassion is what moved Jesus to act.

The application for us is when we feel compassion for others, it should move us to act.

Also, I noticed a similarity between the Samaritan and Jesus...

For the Samaritan to show compassion to this man, it really inconvenienced him:

- He was on a journey from Jerusalem to Jericho...
- We can assume he probably wanted to get to his destination as quickly as possible...

But when he saw this man he went to great lengths to care for him.

I would say the Samaritan welcomed this interruption b/c of the compassion he felt for the man, and the same was true with Jesus:

- Jesus was willing to be interrupted by the crowd b/c of the compassion he felt for them.
- A few weeks ago I had a lesson that related to this, and I want to briefly remind you of it b/c this is one of the best examples: **EMBRACE THE INTERRUPTIONS THE LORD PUTS IN YOUR LIFE.**

This lesson came from Jesus moving through the crowd to get to Jairus' house so He could heal his daughter, but the woman w/ the flow of blood reached out and touched Jesus' garments and it interrupted His progress:

- If you think about Jesus' ministry, interruptions were pretty constant.
- I've experienced interruptions many times in my own life and ministry – as I'm sure is the case w/ all of you – so when I look at the way Jesus **welcomed** these crowds when they interrupted Him, I'm both convicted and challenged by His patience and grace.
- He never seemed frustrated toward people or never made them feel like an inconvenience.

The main point though is I suspect if we're going to feel compassion for others, and that compassion is going to move us to act:

- Just like the Samaritan helping the man on the road...
- Just like Jesus helping the crowds...

We're going to have to be willing to have our lives interrupted.

Gal 6:2 says **Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.**

I think part of the reason it says this is Christ did this so well. Feeling compassion and acting on it is to be like Christ.

So in learning from Jesus' example, and the example of the Good Samaritan, let me ask you this:

- Do you feel compassion toward those who are suffering or struggling?
- Are you aware of the burdens of those around you?

And the next question is, what are you doing about it?

- Compassion doesn't mean much if it doesn't produce.
- What's the point of having compassion toward people if it doesn't cause us to act?

James 2:15-16 explains it like this...

James 2:15 If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, **16** and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that?

In other words, what's the big deal about feeling compassion toward people who are cold or hungry if we don't do anything to help them?

Now let me tell you something about Jesus' compassion in this account that I found interesting...

It says Jesus was **moved with compassion** when He looked at these huge crowds of people, but – if we're honest – it doesn't look like they're suffering that much...if at all!

We can understand Jesus feeling compassion for:

- Widows who lost children...
- Blind men...
- Lepers...

But it's surprising to see Jesus feel compassion in this instance when there's no mention of the people suffering. Sure they got hungry, but I'm sure they ate earlier in the day and they wouldn't have starved if Jesus didn't feed them.

But what some teachers do is they take this account and say, *“Jesus was stirred up with compassion for the people because they were hungry. It's a beautiful picture of the way Jesus cares for our physical needs. He wants to satisfy our basic desires, even preventing us from being hungry.”*

I actually had to change my notes, b/c I had something like that. I had a whole section about Jesus being sensitive to our physical needs, like hunger.

It sounds nice, but there's one big problem with this...

It's not what's taking place in the passage! Look back at **Mark 6:34**...

Mark 6:34 When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, **BECAUSE THEY WERE LIKE SHEEP WITHOUT A SHEPHERD. And he began to teach them many things.**

Jesus wasn't looking out at these people saying, *“Oh they're so hungry. Their stomachs are probably growling!”*

He said they didn't have a shepherd, and this imagery is taken from the OT. Here are a few examples:

- **Num 27:17** Who shall go out before them and come in before them...that the congregation of the LORD may not be **AS SHEEP THAT HAVE NO SHEPHERD.**”
- **1 Kin 22:17** He said, “I saw all Israel scattered on the mountains, **AS SHEEP THAT HAVE NO SHEPHERD.**
- **Eze 34:5a** They were scattered, because **THERE WAS NO SHEPHERD, and they became food for all the wild beasts.**”

The phrase, “sheep without a shepherd” describes people who are physically helpless, starving, or lacking.

Jesus uses the same language here, but to describe the crowds spiritually:

- They don't have spiritual guidance or protection.
- They're exposed to the perils of sin and self-destruction.
- They're unsaved.
- They don't know the Lord.

So what does Jesus do? He starts teaching them:

- **Mark 6:34b He began to teach them many things.**
- **Luke 9:11 He welcomed them and spoke to them of the kingdom of God.**

And this brings us to Lesson 2...

LESSON 2: JESUS FED THEM *FIRST* SPIRITUALLY.

You don't have to turn back to Luke, but there's an exact correspondence between **Luke 9:2** and **Luke 9:11**:

- **Luke 9:2** says [Jesus] sent [the Apostles] out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal.
- **Luke 9:11** says [Jesus] spoke to them of the kingdom of God and cured those who had need of healing.

Even as Jesus carried on His ministry through the Apostles, He kept doing it Himself. It would be somewhat hypocritical if He told them to do things and He wasn't doing those things Himself.

But the point is, whether it was the Apostles' ministry, or Jesus' ministry, you see the importance of feeding people spiritually.

Jesus was deeply concerned about the spiritual welfare of these people, and He remedied that by teaching them.

So I'd like you to keep something in mind...

- When we think of Jesus having compassion on these people and being moved to act, we think of Him feeding them physically.
- He did do that, but before He fed them physically, He first fed them spiritually.

The miracle in this account receives the most attention - and it is truly amazing what Jesus did physically...we should take note of it - but I don't want you to

overlook the spiritual aspects of this account. Before we start looking at the physical miracle next week, let's make sure we recognize that before Jesus dealt w/ their physical needs, He first dealt w/ their greater need which was spiritual.

- What good would that physical food do if they perished for eternity?
- They might have needed physical food, but what they needed even more was spiritual food.
- They weren't physically starving, but they were spiritually starving!

You could hear me say this and then say, *“Well, what if their physical condition was worse? What if they really were starving? Would Jesus have handled their physical needs first?”*

Let me answer this question by showing you an account that took place a few chapters earlier. Turn to **Mark 2:1**...

Mark 2:1 And when he returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was at home. **2** And many were gathered together, so that there was no more room, not even at the door. And he was preaching the word to them. **3** And they came, bringing to him a paralytic carried by four men. **4** And when they could not get near him because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him, and when they had made an opening, they let down the bed on which the paralytic lay. **5** And when Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

Now needless to say, this man looked pretty needy physically:

- Usually people had parts of their bodies that were paralyzed - maybe a hand or an arm or a leg - but this man had to be carried by people, which is to say he was probably a quadriplegic...
- Basically, you couldn't BE much needier than this man physically.

And let's be honest:

- Do you really think this is what these men expected to hear? Did they go to all this trouble to get their paralyzed friend before Jesus so He could look at him and say, “Son, your sins are forgiven”?
- Do you think they got excited and high-fived each other and said, “It worked! This is just what we wanted to hear!”

No. I'm guessing Jesus said this and they thought, “You have GOT to be kidding me! We went to all this trouble, and this is what we get?”

There's only one thing they wanted to hear, and it was the words, "Rise up and walk!"

And think of the poor paralyzed man:

- Imagine how excited he was feeling...
- He's finally in front of Jesus...
- He knows he's going to be healed...
- He's been dealing with something terrible and it's finally going to be over...

Then imagine the tremendous letdown when Jesus said this instead.

But when Jesus said this He was dealing with the man's greatest need. No matter how bad he looked physically, he looked even worse spiritually.

Hopefully you see the similarity to Jesus feeding the 20,000:

- In both accounts Jesus performed a tremendous miracle...
- In both accounts the miracle receives a lot of attention...

But in both accounts you also see Jesus addressed the spiritual before the physical, because:

- No matter how needy the crowd looked physically...
- No matter how needy the paralyzed man looked physically...

Their greatest need was spiritual. So before Jesus fed them physically, He first fed them spiritually.

And here's what else I'd say...

When Jesus looks at us, He sees our greatest need, which is spiritual.

- When Jesus looked at the crowds in **Luke 9**...
- When He looked at the paralytic lowered through the roof...

He felt compassion on them, b/c of their spiritual needs, and when Jesus looks at us He feels compassion on us b/c of our spiritual needs.

And this brings us to our last lesson...

LESSON 3: COMPASSION MOVES THE LORD TO FORGIVE US OUR DEBTS.

I want to invite you to picture something...

Picture Jesus looking at those thousands of people:

- He knew them...
- He knew their spiritual condition...
- He knew they were looking at an eternity separated from Him...
- He knew they needed to be saved...

And He felt compassion for them; a compassion that moved Him to act.

In a sense, the same happened with God the Father...

He looked at the masses of people throughout history:

- He knew them...or I could say He knew us.
- He knew our spiritual condition...
- He knew we were looking at an eternity separated from Him...
- He knew we needed to be saved...

And He felt a compassion for us...

- A compassion that moved Him to act:
- A compassion that moved Him to send His Son so we could be forgiven.

Jesus taught a parable illustrating this. Let me share part of it...

Matt 18:23 Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents.

This man had more debt than anyone could pay given multiple lifetimes, and he represents us:

- His debt represents our debt.
- We could never repay the debt we owe against God given multiple lifetimes.

Listen to what was going to happen to him as a result...

25 But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made.

This was the fate of people in the ancient world when they couldn't repay their debts. Everything would be taken from them, including their spouse or children, b/c those people would become slaves to help repay what was owed.

You can imagine the man's desperation and fear. Listen to how he responded...

26 The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, 'Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.'

Since this man represents us, this is the desperation and fear we should feel. But since the punishment we would face b/c of our sin debt is worse than the punishment this man faced, we should be even more desperate and fearful than he was! But listen to this powerful response from the King...

27 Then the master of that servant was MOVED WITH COMPASSION, released him, and forgave him the debt.

When the Master saw the servant crying out to Him for mercy, He felt compassion, and that compassion moved him to act:

- He completely forgave the man's debt.
- Since the man pictures us and the Master pictures the Lord, the compassion He felt toward the servant when He cried out for mercy pictures the compassion the Lord feels toward us when we cry out to Him for mercy regarding our sin debt.

I'm not sure how many times I've read this account, but something that occurred to me this week as I was studying it is the Master didn't seem to feel any compassion for the man until AFTER he cried out to Him for mercy:

- In **verse 25** it actually says since **he was not able to pay, [the] master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had.**
- The Master didn't seem to be feeling much compassion for him then!

But when that servant fell down before him and begged Him for mercy, the Master was so **moved with compassion** He released him and forgave him everything. It's a beautiful picture of the compassion the Lord feels toward His children when we cry out to Him for mercy.

So this is what I'd say:

- If you've seen yourself as a righteous person, too good to cry out for forgiveness...
- Too prideful to think of falling on your knees and asking God for forgiveness...

Don't expect Him to have much compassion on you.

But if you've humbled yourself and cried out to Him to be forgiven, be encouraged that He's moved with compassion to release you and forgive you your debt. Truly our hearts should be filled with continual thankfulness toward the Lord because of what Jesus has done for us, and because of what we've been forgiven for as a result.

If you have any questions about anything I've said this morning, Pastor Doug and I will be up front after service and we'd consider it a privilege to be able to speak with you.

Let's pray.