

# Compassion on a Crowd

## Ignorance and Insight: Part 4

Mark 6:30-34 (Mt.14:12-14, Lk.9:10-11, Jn.6:1-2) 9/30/2018

Summary: Jesus and the 12 need rest from the crowds so they go to a secluded place (there is a need for rest, and the way to find it is by seeking fellowship with God, not by exposing yourself to the spiritual warfare of TV or something similar). But Jesus canceled his day off (So be flexible - God leads by pointing one direction for a while then another). What changed Jesus' mind was compassion. Enjoy his compassion and imitate it (realizing the magnitude of God's wrath and that your ministry is the solution).

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**30 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.**

## Rest

### The Need for Time Alone

Back in v.7 Jesus sent the 12 out in pairs to travel around and preach and do miracles. We don't know how long that lasted, but in v.30 they come back. Here come James and John. Jesus is excited to see them. They start catching up, and pretty soon—there's Thomas and James. Wow, they look like they've been through the ringer. Oh, here's Andrew and Phillip. Two by two, each of the six teams comes back to Jesus.

**30 The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught.**

I bet! Can you imagine? You come back from any trip and you want to tell you friends and family all about it. But a trip where you were raising the dead and driving out demons and preaching? You know these guys were just busting at the seams to talk to Jesus.

First it says they wanted to talk about **all they had done**. All those miracles. “Hey Jesus! Nathaniel and I found a hospital and just cleared the place. But so many of them still didn’t believe—why is that?” “Remember when we were going over the parables, I told you about the different kinds of soils—people will respond differently based on what kind of heart they have?” “Oh yeah, right. How about this—we healed this one guy, and he offered us money. He said he would support the ministry. How do you handle a situation like that?” “Remember I told you ‘Freely you have received; freely give.’?” I’m sure they had all kinds of questions about everything that surrounded all their miracles.

They also wanted to talk to Jesus about what they had been teaching. “Whenever we brought up the kingdom, the people kept asking us what you’re going to do about Rome. What should we say? And when we told people to repent, some people were saying they didn’t need to because they were children of Abraham. How would you answer that one?”

Jesus starts to answer, “When they ask you that, just tell them ...” Before he can finish the sentence this great big guy steps right in front of him. “Jesus! Please! You’ve got to come heal my wife. She’s dying!” “Hold on a minute, I need to talk to my ...” Then someone pulls Peter’s robe from behind. “My cousin said you healed him yesterday. Can you come and touch my son? He’s been unconscious for almost a week now.” And as soon as some would leave, others would come.

### **31 so many people were coming and going that they did not even have a chance to eat...**

Nathaniel puts some cream cheese on a bagel and before he can put a bite in his mouth someone pulls him away. It’s just relentless.

And then, to make matters worse, they get some crushing news. Some messengers come running up. Jesus can tell right away something’s wrong. “What is it?” “It’s your cousin, John the Baptist.” “Is he OK?” “Jesus ... he’s dead. Murdered by Herod at a party.”<sup>1</sup> Finally, Jesus pulls the plug on this whole scene.

### **31 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.<sup>2</sup>**

Do all those people in the crowd need Jesus? Yes. Could he have done a lot of good ministering to them? Yes, but there are times when you have to say no. You can’t sacrifice the important on the altar of the urgent. So Jesus makes a decision: “We are taking a day off.”

## **There Is A Time for Rest**

There are times when you need to step away from ministry and get some rest. God designed us to need that. He didn’t have to. God could have created us so that your whole body worked like your heart. Your heart starts beating when you’re in the womb and doesn’t stop until you die. It never takes a single moment’s rest your entire life. God could have easily made your whole body like that—no need for any breaks or rest. But instead, in his perfect wisdom, he designed us to constantly get tired, and need rest.

Why? I can think of several reasons (to teach us humility, to keep us dependent on him, etc.). But have you ever thought about this: God created us so that we get tired: because there are attributes of God that you can only experience when you’re tired. The greatest thing that can ever happen to a human being is to have delightful experiences of the attributes of God. One of his attributes is that he is the giver of rest. And only a tired, weary, worn-out person can really experience of that attribute. You don’t appreciate rest when you’re not tired. The more fatigued you are, the more delightful it is when you are able to rest.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 14:12-13 gives this as the reason for the day off.

<sup>2</sup> This is not on the eastern shore. They sailed up to the north end of the Lake. According to Luke 9:10 this uninhabited place was in the vicinity of Bethsaida.

Apart from God's grace, we are not capable of getting rest. That's how helpless we are. We're not even capable of getting a good night's sleep if God doesn't help us.

But in his merciful love, he does help us. And every time you are exhausted and you plop down in your favorite chair and it feels so good to sit down and relax—you are experiencing that attribute of God. Every time you lie down in bed and it feels so good to finally lie down, every time you get a good night's rest, you are learning something about what God is like. He is the giver of rest.

And so rest is a good thing. In Matthew 11 Jesus described salvation as being like rest. In OT times, the holiest day of the week was the rest day (the Sabbath).

Now, we have to be careful, because in our flesh we are tempted to take a break when we don't really need on just because we're lazy. Some people are workaholics and others are leisureaholics. Leisure is like food; it's great when you need it, but if you indulge in it when you don't need it, the results are bad. Jesus took rests definitely wasn't lazy. He got up early and worked hard and sometimes stayed up all night. He loved the work of the ministry.<sup>3</sup> So we need wisdom to know when to rest and when to keep working. But there are times when the most Christ-like thing to do is take a break.

## How to Rest: Get Alone with Jesus

So we know that we need rest from God, but the next question is this: how do you get it? When Jesus was worn out, what did he do to get recharged? Entertainment? No record of that. What did he do? He would go off to an isolated place and seek God in prayer. That's an important example for us, because so often we get tired and want to recharge ourselves, and so we sit down in front of the TV, or we read some inane drivel online, or watch a movie – or one way or another expose ourselves to the world. That's not rest. Physically it is. And mentally it's restful. But spiritually it's warfare. When you subject yourself to TV or a movie or some other worldly pulpit, remember those things are designed by Satan to make God and his way seem less real and less attractive, and to make the world and sin more attractive and more desirable. It's possible to watch a TV show and avoid that effect if you have your spiritual armor on, and you have your guard up, and you're alert, and you work really hard to fight against those influences. But who in his right mind would do that for *rest*? No soldier says, "I'm exhausted. I think I'll go up to the front lines for a little R&R." No, Jesus went to be alone with the Father when he needed to be recharged, and what does he teach the disciples here?

### **31 he said to them, "Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest."**

The first three words are the key—**Come with me**. Just getting away from it all won't do anything. The whole point is to be alone with Christ. That's the only way to rest the weary soul. You can rest your body and rest your mind all day long, but if you don't draw near to Jesus, your soul will remain exhausted.

### **Matthew 11:28 Come to me all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you ... and you will find rest for your souls.**

Jesus said, **Come to me ... and you will find rest for your soul**. So if your soul isn't rested—you're worn out, burned out, no spiritual energy; it's because you're not drawing near enough to Jesus.

Why is it so rare for us to say, "I am exhausted, I think I'll take my Bible and go off by myself for a while"? Go for a walk, maybe find a creek up in the mountains and spend a few hours alone with God.

It's hard, because getting this kind of rest can be physically and mentally demanding. Maybe you end up losing some sleep or leisure time. But physical leisure will do you no good without spiritual rejuvenation. Listen to what Jesus is saying in this passage, because he's saying it to you too: "Come with me, by yourself, to a secluded place, and get some rest."

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<sup>3</sup> See John 4:34.

## Plan B

### The Day off Cancelled

So in the midst of all this chaos, Jesus calls an audible and says, “Ok, we’re out of here.” They leave that place, they go to the lake, and they all climb in the boat.

#### **32 So they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place.**

But even while they are doing that, people at that marina know who they are.

#### **33 But many who saw them leaving recognized them**

Remember, the 12 had just canvassed this whole region preaching and doing miracles. If the crowds were out of control back when it was just one man doing miracles, multiply that now time 13. So what do they do? They wave goodbye to the folks on the shore and sail away.

The last time they did this, the people anxiously awaited their return. But now the hysteria is cranked up even more.

#### **33 But many who saw them leaving recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them.**

This time they don’t wait for Jesus to return. They run along the shore, so they were there when Jesus landed.<sup>4</sup> The boat lands at what was supposed to be a deserted, uninhabited, solitary haven of rest that was to be a retreat from the crowds, and the first thing they see as they get close to shore is a massive, needy, clamoring mob of people.<sup>5</sup> 34 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd...He said, “Sorry folks, we’re closed. Check back on Monday.” No, that’s not what happened. Instead he looks at his disciples and says, “Change of plans guys.”

#### **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.**

Jesus cancels their much-needed day off.

### He Welcomed Them

Most of us are irritated by crowds. All the noise an hassle and long lines and big messes. We usually don’t like crowds, and most of us also tend to recoil from needy people. Do you know any people in your life who are really needy? You see them and think, *Oh, this person is just going to suck me dry*, and you just want to run—especially when we’re exhausted like Jesus and the 12 were here.

That’s how we respond, and so people assume that’s how Jesus must have responded. I’ve heard preachers preach this text and say, “Jesus saw this crowd and thought, *Oh brother—don’t tell me. Another needy crowd. Oh well, I guess I have to do this*, and he grudgingly got out of the boat and began ministering to them. That’s not how it was. In fact, in Luke 9:11 it says, **he welcomed them**. That word refers to a warm, enthusiastic, welcoming—receiving someone into your presence with a feeling of joy and gladness that they are there.

Jesus wasn’t irritated by crowds or by needy people. Jesus loved crowds, because he loved all the individuals in the crowd. And when he saw needy people, his first thought wasn’t what it would cost him. It was what he could do for them. So he cancelled the day off to minister to the people.

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<sup>4</sup> Some ran straight there. Others went into the various towns and spread the word and all those people came. So it sounds like there was already a crowd when Jesus landed, and that crowd kept increasing in size as more and more people arrived.

<sup>5</sup> This is difficult to reconcile with John’s account, where it sounds like Jesus and the 12 made it to a secluded place on a mountainside for a time before the crowd came. Perhaps Mark is abbreviating the story, or they were able to get away for a time during the day.

William Barclay calls this the rhythm of the Christian life. The Christian life is a continuous going into the presence of God from the presence of men and coming out into the presence of men from the presence of God. We face two dangers in life: the danger of too much work and the danger of too much withdrawal. If we do too much work and fail to get alone with God, our work will be ineffective, because we won't have enough fellowship with God to receive the grace we need. If we have too much withdrawal, we won't have enough fellowship with men to dispense all that grace. Barclay: "Prayer that does not issue in work is not real prayer. We must never seek the fellowship of God in order to avoid the fellowship of men but rather in order to fit ourselves better for it. The rhythm of the Christian life is the alternate meeting with God in the secret place and serving men in the market place."

## Be Flexible

So Jesus cancels their day off. You know what that's called? Plan B. And that's fascinating to me, because Jesus always did the Father's will—always, always, always, no exceptions. Earlier he had decided it was God's will for him to take the day off. Now he decides it's God's not to take the day off. Was he wrong the first time? Or the second time? No, he wasn't wrong either time. This is a great example of how God guides us in life. He doesn't speak to you and say, "It is my will that you do X." No. What he does is work in your heart so you love the things he loves, so when you make decisions, you chose things that please him. And when you have to decide between one thing that pleases him or something else that pleases him, you use wisdom. Before they got in the boat, Jesus used wisdom, assessed the circumstances and made a good decision: time for a day off. That was pleasing to the Father. Then when he landed and saw that crowd, he changed his mind and canceled the day off. And that was also pleasing to the Father.

There's something to be said for flexibility in ministry, isn't there? Sometimes you seek God's guidance, you pray about it, ask advice, consult the Scriptures, think it through, and you're very confident God is leading you in one direction. But then when some time passes, and you get some more information, or a different perspective, you need to change course. If you're the type who is inflexible and can't ever handle any change of plans, think about this: If Jesus Christ had flawless wisdom and he changed course, what does that say about how flexible we should be with our very limited, very fallible wisdom? We're going to see next week that the miracle Jesus ended up performing here was probably the most important miracle he ever performed outside of his own resurrection. So the greatest, most important miracle Jesus ever performed happened in plan B. It happened when Jesus changed his mind about something he had decided to do.

## Compassion

### The Reason

So that brings us to the next question. If the decision to take the day off was a good, godly, wise decision; what made Jesus change his mind? How did he know that it wasn't the Father's desire for him to turn the boat around and get away from this crowd and go ahead with the day off? Did he get a prompting? No, nothing here about a prompting. How did he know God's will at that moment? Look what the text says.

**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.**

What changed Jesus' mind was an emotional response of **compassion**.

**The word translated compassion refers to pain in the midsection.**

You know how when you see someone in severe pain, and you feel so sorry for him that you actually feel physical pain in your stomach? That's what this word refers to. An equivalent in our language would

be “gut-wrenching.” A feeling of compassion has to be awfully strong for you to feel it in your stomach. This is such a strong word, the only person in the entire Bible who is ever said to have this kind of compassion is Jesus. But it’s used to describe Jesus numerous times, including here.

## **Enjoy Christ’s Compassion**

And it’s important for you to know that Jesus is like this. The compassion of Christ is a marvelous thing and learning how to enjoy it is a crucial part of living the Christian life. If you learn how to experience his compassion, that will be a balm that will soothe all kinds of inner turmoil—things like worry, fear, anger, stress, anxiety. All of those melt into peace when you enjoy Jesus’ compassion. His compassion gives us life.

### **Psalm 119:77 Let your compassion come to me that I may live.**

And God is eager to express his compassion to us. He can’t wait.

### **Isaiah 30:18 Yet the LORD longs to be gracious to you; he rises to show you compassion.**

When God cares for you, it’s not out of some contractual obligation. It’s not like a government program, where resources are made available to you just because you are in the system. No, it’s way more personal than that. When God takes care of you, that care is driven by deep emotion in God’s heart toward you. Deep, powerful, compelling feelings of compassion.

### **Psalm 103:13 As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him.**

Probably the main reason parenthood exists is to teach us about the way God is toward his people. If you’re legally obligated by a contract, you might do the bare minimum. But if your own little child is in pain or in danger, your heart is moved to act in all kinds of ways above and beyond whatever promises you have made. There are no feelings of compassion stronger than those you feel toward your own children when they are in pain or in danger. And God’s compassion is stronger than that.

### **Isaiah 49:15 Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!**

If I tried to read all the passages that emphasize God’s compassion for us, we’d be here all day. It’s one of God’s most essential attributes, and Scripture reminds us about it over and over and over.<sup>6</sup> God keeps on reminding us about his compassion because he wants us to be aware of it. To pay attention to it when it happens.

God designed us to crave compassion. When you’ve had a really rough day, and you tell someone about it, you do that because you want their compassion. And it’s fine to enjoy human compassion, but so much better to enjoy God’s compassion. When you suffer, take some time to think about how your suffering is affecting God emotionally. When you are hurt in some way, and no one feels sorry for you—God knows what you’re feeling, and he feels the pain of compassion. Sometimes there are things that are so hard, but no one else would understand. You wake up in the morning with zero motivation, and it’s all you can do just to get out of bed. But no one feels sorry for you because you had to get up out of bed. In fact, they look down on you because you struggle. But God knows how hard it is for you, and he feels for you. God has compassion when he sees your struggle against sin, when he sees the pain and anguish in your heart, when something is difficult for you, when you get left out, or made fun of, or overlooked, or mistreated, or neglected. He even has compassion when he knows of some trouble you’re in that you aren’t even aware of. Or when you’re in trouble because of your own sin or stupidity.

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<sup>6</sup> I say “most essential” because when Moses asked God to reveal himself, God responded by describing himself and the very first description was compassionate. “The LORD, the LORD, compassionate and gracious...” (Exodus 34:6). And that description is probably the most often repeated statement in the entire OT. God really wants us to understand that particular truth about him.

**Isaiah 54:7 "For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back. 8 In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you," says the LORD your Redeemer.**

When David asked God to forgive his sin of adultery and murder, he appealed to God's compassion.

**Psalm 51:1 ... according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.**

Your life will be a lot happier if you increase your awareness of God's compassion for you, and take the time to enjoy it as often as possible.

And the more you enjoy it, the more you can imitate it.<sup>7</sup>

**Colossians 3:12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.**

## **Spiritual Calamity**

Ok, let's get back to the story. Jesus went to plan B and cancelled his day off because of his deep compassion for this crowd. What was it that was so dire about their situation that it wrenched Jesus' stomach? Usually you don't feel pain in your stomach for someone unless that person is bleeding or has broken bones or something really extreme. Were these people bleeding? No.<sup>8</sup> Were they poor or oppressed? No. A crowd this size would have had all kinds of people—rich, poor, strong, weak. So what did Jesus see that broke his heart?

**34 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.**

It wasn't their physical problems that moved Jesus so much; it was their spiritual problems. Spiritual problems are infinitely more serious than physical problems. If we give people money or food or shelter, but we don't give them the gospel, we haven't shown mercy.

Jesus cared about spiritual problems. So what was the spiritual problem this crowd had? **They were like sheep without a shepherd.** That phrase, **sheep without a shepherd**, was used several times in the OT to refer to a people that was helpless and vulnerable because they had no leader. The first person to use that phrase was Moses. When God told Moses he was about to die, what do you think his first thought was? Is it going to hurt? When is it going to happen? Will I get to say goodbye to my wife? No. Do you want to hear the first thing that came to his mind?

**Numbers 27:15 Moses said to the LORD, 16 "May the LORD ... appoint a man over this community...so the LORD's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd."**

He knew that without a leader, the people of Israel would be helpless and vulnerable—just like sheep. The other times that phrase appears it refers to a king being killed and the country being

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<sup>7</sup> God is pleased when we imitate his compassion. In fact, he built it into our very bodies. Have you ever wondered why you feel pain in your stomach when you see someone else seriously injured or in a lot of pain? When you see someone in great pain, your body actually inflicts pain on itself by secreting acids that irritate your insides. Why does the human body do that?

I'll tell you one thing—that didn't evolve. Compassion doesn't help in the survival of the fittest at all. If two cavemen were fighting over some food, and the stronger one, each time he got the upper hand, started feeling sorry for his opponent, how does that help him survive? If the Titanic is sinking, Darwin would have the strongest ones survive. But love and pity and compassion could drive the strongest man on the ship to give his life jacket to a helpless, weak individual. That does not fit evolutionary theory at all.

It makes perfect sense, however, if our bodies were designed by a compassionate Creator who arranged our physiology to express his great heart of compassion. His craftsmanship in our bodies is obvious – he even left the thumbprint of his love on the lining of our internal organs and acids!

<sup>8</sup> Luke mentions that Jesus did heal some of them, but that is not the reason given for Jesus' compassion.

vulnerable. In the book of Ezekiel, God rebukes the spiritual leaders of Israel. He calls them “shepherds of Israel.” And he rebukes them for failing to care for the people. Then God says this:

**Ezekiel 34:23 I will place over them one shepherd, my servant David ... 25 so that they may live in the desert<sup>9</sup> 26 ... there will be showers of blessing.**

God blesses his people through their shepherd. So Jesus sees this massive multitude of Israelites and the thing that wrenched his stomach was the fact that they had no shepherd—no king, no Moses-type leader, and that broke Jesus’ heart. When Jesus was faced with a whole crowd of people who were sick and diseased and needed physical healing, he felt for them, but he could still peel away from them in order to get some time alone with the 12. But this—seeing these people as sheep without a shepherd, that was too much. He couldn’t say no to that. He had to deal with that calamity.

So what is he going to do? It almost sounds like he’s going to step up and be a king for them, doesn’t it?<sup>10</sup> That’s the kind of shepherding they have in mind. But what about Jesus? What kind of leadership is he going to give them?

## Teaching

**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.**

That’s it. They needed leadership; they needed shepherding, so what does Jesus give them? Political leadership? No. Military leadership? No. Organizational leadership? No. Does he give them food? Money? Houses? No. The only thing he gives them is teaching. That’s what they needed most. At his Second Coming Jesus will provide all those other kinds of leadership. But at this point, he gives them the kind of leadership that would help them more than anything else he could give them: instruction from the Word of God.<sup>11</sup>

We all love the 23<sup>rd</sup> psalm—the LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside quiet waters. ... He restores my soul. Beautiful stuff, right? Do you want that? Do you want Jesus to be a shepherd to you? The #1 way to receive shepherding from him is to receive his teaching. The food you need for life—it’s right here. His rod and his staff that comfort you—right here. Everything you need to be fully equipped for every good work—right here. Spend time in his Word every day and receive his shepherding.

And that’s also an example for us as we seek to show compassion. Compassion is one of the great virtues that has marked Christianity throughout the ages. No other organization or group or religion has done more to help the poor and sick and needy and downtrodden than the church. Most hospitals and

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<sup>9</sup> The word Mark uses to describe this place (**solitary place** in the NIV), is the same word used for desert, or wilderness throughout the book. And in the Greek translation of Ezekiel 34:25, it’s the word used to describe where the Messiah would tend his flock like a shepherd, and also the place where God cared for the Israelites after the Exodus. It doesn’t always have to refer to a desert (in this case there is green grass). It simply refers to an uninhabited area. But there’s no question this reference to a shepherd in an uninhabited area would call the Ezekiel passage to mind, even though they refer to two different kinds of uninhabited areas.

<sup>10</sup> They are out in the wilderness, which is where revolutions often began. The people were expecting a Messiah who would come as a military leader. Here’s Jesus, making all kinds of messianic claims, showing awesome power, and now he’s got this crowd of thousands gathered. And notice that we are told how many males are present. V.44 **The number of the men who had eaten was five thousand.** There were also women and children present, but he specifically tells us the number of the men. It sounds like an army—especially with this formation. V.40 **they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties.** Five thousand men—that would be a significant army right there. And Jesus makes these comments about how the nation needs a king or Moses-type leader. The people picked up on this. In John’s account of this miracle he tells us that this crowd ends up trying to make Jesus king.

<sup>11</sup> While Jesus did have compassion and was willing to give up his rest to meet their needs, that doesn’t mean he gave them what they wanted. He didn’t. They wanted a king; he gave them a sermon. In ministry people will make a lot of demands on you. Sometimes they will try to make you feel guilty for not catering to their every desire. Be eager to minister, but when you do, focus on their needs, not their demands. Above all, offer people God’s Word.



homeless shelters and soup kitchens and all the rest were founded by Christians. We take after our Lord and are moved with compassion when we see people in trouble.

But if we really take after our Lord, then the trouble that will move our hearts and stomachs the most won't be poverty or hunger or physical problems. It will be when we see sheep without a shepherd—people going through life without knowing the Lord Jesus Christ as their good shepherd. And when we are moved to compassion over that, what will we do? The same thing Jesus did on this day. We will give them his Word.