

First Serve

Studies in the Gospel of Mark

Text

Mark 6:30-44

Topic

Jesus feeds the five thousand and gives His followers a lesson in what it means to live life moved with compassion

Title

"Compassionistas"

Introduction

You may be among those who have chosen your 'word' for 2016.

For those of you who don't know what I'm talking about, in a twist on the classic New Year's Resolution, it's being suggested that you choose a single word as either a goal to achieve, or a guide for your life.

Is there is a single word that captures what you would like to manifest in your self, or in your life, in 2016?

If you can't think of one, maybe 'help' should be your word.

Whether you've already chosen your word, or you think this is all what Chuck Smith would call "hooey," I have a word to suggest, one that is applicable for all of us.

It is *compassion*.

It is a great word for a Christian because it was so characteristic of Jesus. Charles Spurgeon said this:

"He was moved with compassion" is said of Jesus several times in the New Testament. The original word is a very remarkable one. It is not found in classic Greek. It is not found in the Septuagint. The fact is, it was a word coined by the evangelists themselves. They did not find one in the whole Greek language that suited their purpose, and therefore they had to make one. It is expressive of the deepest emotion; a striving of the bowels - a yearning of the innermost nature with pity. I suppose that when our Savior looked upon certain sights, those who watched Him closely perceived that his internal agitation was very great, His emotions were very deep, and then His face betrayed it, His eyes gushed like founts with tears, and you saw that His big heart was ready to burst with pity for the sorrow upon which His eyes were gazing. He was moved with compassion. His whole nature was agitated with commiseration for the sufferers before him.

Now, although this word is not used many times even by the evangelists, yet it may be taken as a clue to the Savior's whole life. **If you would sum up the whole character of Jesus in reference to ourselves, it might be gathered into this one sentence, "He was moved with compassion."**

Here is another way to stress this word. In the game, *Password*, you give your partner a one-word clue to the word you're trying to guess. If you were playing Bible Password, the clue "compassion" should elicit the word "Jesus" on the very first try.

Since "Christian" means "Christ-like," then compassion should characterize us too.

I'll organize my thoughts around two points: #1 When You Look At Jesus, You See Compassion, and #2 When People Look At You, They Should See Compassion.

#1 When You Look At Jesus You See Compassion

(v30-34)

I initially thought the Spurgeon quote had gone too far. There must be other words that better characterize Jesus.

But as I thought about it, I had to agree that compassion, if not the best word, is in the top three.

Jesus Christ has pitied mankind, and had compassion on us, from eternity past. He was moved with compassion to come as a man, to resolve the issue of our sin by dying on the Cross.

In that sense, compassion includes, and is the motivation for, **all** of His work on our behalf. It is a main heading under which we could put His incarnation, His perfect life, His substitutionary atonement, His resurrection, His ascension into Heaven, His Second Coming, and every other good word and work of His on our behalf.

Saving us was not some mechanical, theological assignment for Jesus. It was motivated by, and sustained by, His compassion.

We pick up the story as the twelve disciples of Jesus return from having been sent out two-by-two preaching the Gospel, healing the sick, and delivering folks from demons.

Mar 6:30 Then the apostles gathered to Jesus and told Him all things, both what they had done and what they had taught.

We would call this a debriefing. We need to be more prone to, and more open to, analysis of our walk with the Lord, and of the ministry. What worked; what didn't work. Where did we follow the leading of the Holy Spirit, and where did our flesh get in the way. What was the fruit.

We need to be less sensitive to critiquing and more serious about our commission.

I'm not talking about criticism, but critiquing. Evaluating, with the Bible open, and hearts filled with the Holy Spirit.

This is the first use by Mark of the word "apostles." We sometimes say that there were apostles with a capital 'A,' and apostles with a lower-case 'a.'

The first century, capital 'A,' Apostle met the requirements set out by Peter in the Book of Acts when he said they must be, "men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us..." (1:21-22). Obviously, there are no men that meet that requirement outside of the early church period.

Apostle with a lower-case 'a' means a *messenger* or an *ambassador*. We are all apostles, in that sense, but to avoid confusion, we should not use that as a title.

Mar 6:31 And He said to them, "Come aside by yourselves to a deserted place and rest a while." For there were many coming and going, and they did not even have time to eat.

I can't blame the people for not leaving them alone. I mean, if there was any chance for a miraculous healing or deliverance, they had to go for it.

Jesus invited them to an apostle's retreat. Imagine the flier: "Come to rest and eat, with your very special guest speaker, Jesus Christ, the Son of God."

Sign me up! Except it would turn out to be a working retreat.

I know we need rest, but, as the saying goes, there will be plenty of time for resting when you're dead. Now is a time to work, and not get weary in your well-doing.

Let me be clear. I'm not against R&R, but it can't always be counted on. Ministry happens on God's time table, not ours.

Mar 6:32 So they departed to a deserted place in the boat by themselves.

This was the first recorded Christian Ministry Cruise. You see those advertised all the time - cruises with your favorite Bible teachers.

Only this one that the apostles were on was in a smelly fishing boat, with no accommodations. And they weren't headed to the Mexican Riviera, but to "a deserted place."

Mar 6:33 But the multitudes saw them departing, and many knew Him and ran there on foot from all the cities. They arrived before them and came together to Him.

Usually the shortest route is a straight line, but, in this case, the people were able to run along the shoreline, keeping the Good Ship Jesus in their sight, and thus beat Him to His landing.

Think about this crowd for a moment. The people who were coming to Jesus, at least the majority of them, were ill, infirm, afflicted. Many must have been advanced in age.

Jesus and His guys could see them from their boat. That was the view from their stateroom, as it were, on this cruise.

It was a pathetic sight. Lame men and women doing their best to run to Jesus, probably tripping over one another, pushing each other, and falling. People carrying their friends and family, doing their best to run to Jesus.

Some of you, for reasons that escape me, watch the PBS hit series, *Downton Abbey*. One of its main characters, John Bates, walks with a limp. Comedian Jimmy Fallon parodies *Downton Abbey*, and in his version, Bates has an incredibly heavy iron prosthetic. It takes him forever to drag himself across a room.

It's hilarious as a parody, but not in real life. Seeing a multitude of people dragging themselves, or being carried along, or limping, to see Jesus ought to evoke a response that is far from humor.

There's really only one proper spiritual response, and here it comes.

Mar 6:34 And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things.

Mark's perspective is that Jesus is the One true Shepherd of mankind, and we are all like sheep who have gone astray. Most commentators say that Peter provided Mark with the source material for his Gospel. You can see that here, because Peter once said of Jesus, "for you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls" (First Peter 2:25).

Mark emphasized that Jesus "began to teach them many things." The greatest need the multitude had was the message Jesus went about proclaiming - repentance from sin, and faith in Him.

The greatest need a person has is always spiritual. Keep that central as you determine if, when, and how to meet physical needs.

All of us have, from time-to-time, been especially moved by some awareness of the tragedy of the human condition. Maybe you're watching TV, and suddenly one of those ads airs, that show the terrible plight of third-world children. You're moved by it, deeply affected, and, maybe, you even act upon that compassion by sending support.

Jesus was moved like that, only in a much deeper way, **all the time, from the beginning of time.** With His insight into the human race, and His hindsight and foresight, He saw the greatest need in each heart, and wanted to meet that need.

BTW - He sees your need *right now.* He's not done being moved with compassion for **you.**

#2 When People Look At You, They Should See Compassion

(v35-44)

Jesus was taking His guys on a retreat for a little well-deserved, and much needed, R&R. Compassion dictated a change of plans.

Meditate on that statement: **Compassion dictates a change of plans.** It could be a change of plans for a day or for a season.

It could dictate a change of plans for your entire life and it's work.

The apostles needed to learn more about compassion. They had some - but not the Jesus kind. So the Lord schooled them on it.

Mar 6:35 When the day was now far spent, His disciples came to Him and said, "This is a deserted place, and already the hour is late.

Mar 6:36 Send them away, that they may go into the surrounding country and villages and buy themselves bread; for they have nothing to eat."

We are so used to criticizing the apostles that we overlook their efforts. Give the guys some credit. They were, in fact, thinking about the needs of the multitude. The people needed to eat and, recognizing their need, they suggested a dinner break.

Unless you are some kind of high-functioning sociopath, you have compassion. It's part of what it means to be human. It's just that your compassion needs Jesus to perfect it.

Mar 6:37 But He answered and said to them, "**You** give them something to eat." And they said to Him, "Shall we go and buy two hundred denarii worth of bread and give them something to eat?"

Jesus suggested a much different scenario for showing compassion. The first principle of compassion immediately emerged. It is captured by one word - the first word Jesus spoke to them. "You."

Compassion is all about **you** getting involved, personally. Now, that can mean a lot of things. Take the example I used before of the needy third-world kids. You can get involved by supporting one or more of them; or by adopting a third-world child; or by going to serve them on the mission field.

Or you might be moved, but nevertheless do nothing because you are led by the Holy Spirit to be showing compassion in other ways, to other people.

There is a lot of suffering in the human race, and we can't all do everything, or the same thing. Being a Christian isn't like having a well-rounded spiritual portfolio that must include certain things, like a third-world kid. Let God direct your compassion.

Having said that, there still needs to be "You" involved showing compassion to someone, somehow, somewhere.

Mar 6:38 But He said to them, "How many loaves do you have? Go and see." And when they found out they said, "Five, and two fish."

The second principle Jesus taught them is that God expects you to start meeting the needs you see by marshaling whatever resources you have.

This is important, because one of the things that kills compassion is the argument that the needs are so overwhelming we might as well do nothing. Just the opposite is true: The needs are so overwhelming, we need to do something.

Think of Jesus, and His coming to save us, motivated by His compassion. I hate to refer to it, because it is so unbiblical, but there's a great lyric in *Jesus Christ Superstar* that says,

*Every time I look at you
I don't understand
Why you let the things you did
Get so out of hand
You'd have managed better
If you'd had it planned
Now why'd you choose such a backward time
And such a strange land?
If you'd come today
You could have reached the whole nation
Israel in 4BC had no mass communication*

Think of the massively overwhelming needs of billions of human beings born dead in trespasses and sins from the time of Adam forward. Moved with compassion, Jesus came, but in the first century. He talked, for example, with a woman at a well. On paper, it would seem not even a drop in the bucket.

Jesus did what He could, for a short three-and-one-half years, and God multiplied it exponentially to the salvation of perhaps billions through the centuries.

What do you have? It's yours, by the way. Most of the time, when discussing material things, we say that everything you have comes from, and therefore belongs to, the Lord.

However, the apostle Peter, when talking to Ananias and Sapphira about their donation to the Jerusalem church, said,

[Act 5:4](#) While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control?

It gives us a different take on our possessions. They are ours, to distribute as liberally, or as frugally, as we choose.

Make sure you are distributing the portion God puts on your heart, and don't fall into the trap of thinking your portion is insignificant.

[Mar 6:39](#) Then He commanded them to make them all sit down in groups on the green grass.

[Mar 6:40](#) So they sat down in ranks, in hundreds and in fifties.

It seems as though they sat in semi-circles, on the grass, starting in rows of fifty, then expanding to rows of one hundred. Think amphitheater, only without benches.

I guess the first thing I'd say about this is that Jesus fully expected God's power to be on display, and He readied for it.

Expectation and readiness go hand-in-hand. If you expect God to work, you will be ready, and if you're ready, God can work.

An example of this is how we have restructured our end-of-service on Sunday morning. We expect God to speak to us, therefore we leave time, at the end, to reflect on what He has said, or is saying.

We have men up front, ready to pray, expecting that God is going to prompt folks.

Life can become spiritually mundane - at home, at work, at school, even in church - to the point you lose a sense of expectation and, therefore, are no longer ready by preparing for God to do something.

Ask the Lord - today - what He wants you to do to be ready for Him to act.

Mar 6:41 And when He had taken the five loaves and the two fish, He looked up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to His disciples to set before them; and the two fish He divided among them all.

Jesus thanked His Father, then He kept breaking the loaves, and distributing the fish. It just kept coming.

It was a miracle, but that doesn't mean we need a miracle to see God do things like that by His power today. A good example would be Operation Christmas Child.

You know, the ministry of Samaritan's Purse, where you fill a shoebox and send it, with the Gospel, to a third-world child.

Do you know how it started? Dave Cooke, a father of four from Wrexham, North Wales, saw the horror of abandoned children in Romanian orphanages on TV news, and was moved with compassion. He asked friends to help fill a truck with toys and drive it to Romania.

Overwhelming response from local people raised \$85,000. On December 12, 1990, a convoy of vehicles, including trucks donated by local companies, left for Romania with seventeen local volunteers. Among the aid on the convoy were the first gift-filled shoeboxes. On their return the volunteers vowed to continue the work.

Fast forward: Since then, Operation Christmas Child, has collected and delivered more than 124 million gift-filled shoeboxes to children in more than 150 countries and territories.

More than 500,000 volunteers worldwide, with more than 100,000 of those in the United States, are involved in collecting, shipping, and distributing shoebox gifts.

More than 4.7 million children have participated in The Greatest Journey, Operation Christmas Child's follow-up program that is offered to many children who receive shoebox gifts. The Greatest Journey is implemented through a global church network to help children learn how to know and follow Jesus.

Is that a miracle? No; it's the power of God operating through people of God who are moved with compassion.

Skip ahead to verse forty-four.

Mar 6:44 Now those who had eaten the loaves were about five thousand men.

Five thousand of them were men - meaning there were women and children who were not counted. This multitude was minimum five thousand people, and maybe double or even quadruple that.

For the sake of easy math, let's put the number at twelve thousand - one thousand for each of the twelve apostles of Jesus to personally serve.

Some of you have waited tables. How long, and how hard, to wait on a thousand people during the dinner rush?

Compassion is hands-on. You need to get personally involved. It's not just about the money, or the support. It's why, when someone comes with an idea, we immediately think that God might want them to implement it.

I wonder if the crowds furthest back thought the food would run-out before it got to them. That happens today, does it not, at soup kitchens and rescue missions.

Does that mean God isn't able to provide? It can mean a lot of things, but never that God somehow lacks sufficiency, or can't help. There's usually a lesson for us when there seems to be a lack, and we should seek the Lord to reveal it.

Sometimes the lesson is to learn to be content in want, to learn how to be abased. Those are also mercies from God, even if they are severe mercies.

We like to say, "Where God guides, God provides." The lack of provision can be a tell that God is not in it - and that we should be seeking Him for what we *should* be pursuing.

Back to verse forty-two.

Mar 6:42 So they all ate and were filled.

They were gluttoned; they couldn't eat any more. It reminds us God desires to be generous, and that He is somewhat extravagant in His gifts.

Would you describe your compassion as generous and extravagant? If not, why not? Your salvation is both generous and extravagant. Any ministry that flows from it should be, too.

Mar 6:43 And they took up twelve baskets full of fragments and of the fish.

The "baskets" were packs carried by each apostle to hold provisions. Think backpack or man-purse.

This episode started with the fact that they were so pressed upon by the people that they had no time even to eat. They retreated for a meal, but the people followed them, and pressed upon them all the more.

Then Jesus fed five- to twenty-thousand people without the apostles getting so much as a mouthful.

It is the consummate principle, the pinnacle, of Jesus' lesson on compassion: **You are here to *serve*, not *be served*.**

That's what Jesus did - serve, not be served, and gave His life as a ransom for you.

God met their needs by giving each of them a basket of left-overs.

Are you OK with that? Serving others first, and settling for what is left over?

I think you are, because that is what it means to be a Christian. We just need to be reminded of it from time to time, because, unlike Jesus, our compassion can falter and fail.

In Lamentations 3:22-23, we are told, "the LORD'S lovingkindnesses indeed never cease, for His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; Great is [His] faithfulness."

The apostles had compassion - they just needed Jesus to guide and empower it.

You have compassion. Ask Jesus to guide and empower it.

One final, but important, commentary. We said that when Jesus was moved with compassion, He preached the Gospel to the multitude.

The most compassionate thing you can do is share the love of Jesus Christ with sinners.

You can do more, by meeting physical and material needs.

But nothing is more compassionate than a concern for the eternal souls of those you live with and among.

If you are sharing Christ, His Gospel, others 'see' His compassion
- whether they realize it or not.