

The Shepherd God

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[0 : 00] I grew up going to church like many of you. The whole family went and growing up we did lots of church and Christian stuff together, you know, like praying and Bible reading and discussion and church camps too.

Like the one coming up, you should go. And, you know, I really liked it. My friends were there in kids' church and youth group. And so from a young age, like many of you, I heard lots about Jesus. He was my saviour. He died in my place. Great news to grow up hearing and believing. And even after school, I was heavily involved.

That is, after I finished school. My friends were there. It's where I wanted to be. I was a kids' church and youth leader for many years.

I gave up lots for church stuff, like many of you. And now church wasn't the only thing in my life. In the years after school, I had lots of friends not from church who I spent lots of time with.

[1 : 24] And often I got into the things that they were into, which, you know, sometimes were pretty unwholesome. I wasn't tempted or challenged that much as a Christian during my time in high school.

And so when those temptations and trials came along as a young adult, I really struggled. And yes, I knew that Jesus was my saviour.

I knew that he had died for my sins. I knew that he had and could and would do all this stuff for me. But there was a disconnect in what I knew. I think I was actually an infant in my faith. I rarely said no.

I rarely stood firm in the spiritual battle that was raging in me. I seemed to know Jesus so well.

[2 : 32] But there was something missing. Today, as we continue meeting Jesus in Mark's gospel, we're going to see that those closest to him, those who had seen so much, who knew so much, there was something that they couldn't see or perhaps wouldn't see.

So on your outlines, point one. The disciples had returned from their mission. Jesus had sent them out, do you remember? To preach, to cast out demons and to heal.

And now they were back, ready to take some time and report everything they'd done. Let's have a look at it. Grab your Bibles from verse 30. The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all they had done and taught.

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.

And so they went away by themselves in a boat to a solitary place. They, the disciples, were ready for some quality time with Jesus.

[3 : 50] Go off, chill somewhere, get some rest and debrief. And so they took the boat in search of their solitary place. But it was not to be, verse 33.

But many who saw them leaving, recognized them and ran on foot from all the towns and got there ahead of them. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them.

Because they were like sheep without a shepherd. And so he began to teach them many things.

They went to their quiet place, but it was already buzzing with people.

People who'd seen them and run to meet them. I could imagine the disciples being a bit upset. No special Jesus time after all.

But Jesus was not reacting like that, was he? He was all heart. When he saw them, he had compassion on them because they were like sheep without a shepherd.

[4 : 54] As a reader, this phrase should stand out. Shepherd language in the Old Testament was nearly always associated with God or with the King.

The Savior, the protector of the people, the comforter. You might be able to think of a well-known psalm where David says this about the Lord.

Here in Mark, we see God's people desperately seeking comfort and help coming to Jesus. What else is interesting is at this point, there is a king in Israel, isn't there?

But not a good one. We heard about him in last week's passage. He's not a wise king. He makes offers to give away up to half his kingdom to a dancer.

He doesn't have real authority. He even gets trapped by his own oaths. It's no wonder the Jews are running after Jesus, the one with real authority and power.

[6 : 07] Jesus has compassion and cares for the sheep, whereas Herod is clueless and parties with the elite.

Sometimes it feels like this contrast still exists today. Not all our leaders are as dopey as Herod, though some at the moment are giving it a real go.

But whether people say they believe in Jesus or not, do you notice that the internet is filled with people who are desperate for something or someone other than what we have?

Desperate for compassion, desperate for guidance, for comfort. Jesus was going to show these people and his disciples that he was what they needed and so much more.

Point two. Let's pick it up from verse 35. By this time it was late in the day, so his disciples came to him and said, this is a remote place and it's already very late.

[7 : 21] Send the people away so they can go to the surrounding countryside and villages and buy themselves something to eat. And so this session, it seems, had been going on for quite a while.

And so the disciples were like, we better wrap things up. Let's send these people out of here so they can find some dinner. It must have been either the first or the third week of the month.

But Jesus has other plans. He tells them, you give them something. Now, up till now, we don't really know how many there are, but we get an idea when they respond.

Excuse me, Jesus. Did you say feed them all? That would take more than half a year's wages should we spend that much money on one meal.

It's funny, isn't it? The disciples have just returned from casting out demons and healing the sick, very clearly empowered by the spirit of the Lord.

[8 : 28] But now when faced with this impossible problem, they have a very earthly, a very human response. It's like they witness so much, but what really goes in?

Jesus knew exactly what he was going to do. He asked them what food they have, five loaves and two fish, probably barely enough food to feed the 13 of them.

Let's see what happened from verse 39. Then Jesus directed them to have all the people sit down in groups on the green grass. So they sat down in groups of hundreds and fifties, taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven.

He gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to his disciples to distribute to the people. He also divided the two fish among them all. They all ate and were satisfied.

And the disciples picked up 12 basketfuls of broken pieces of bread and fish. The number of men who had eaten was 5,000.

[9 : 39] They were like sheep without a shepherd. Far from home, tired and hungry and supposedly too many mouths to feed.

But Mark tells us that they left satisfied. Herod satisfies his guests by murdering prophets.

Jesus, the shepherd of Israel, satisfies God's people by miraculously providing food from heaven.

Point three.

By now, it's the end of the day. So Jesus sends the disciples away by boat while he dismisses the crowd. Interesting, isn't it? He isn't a performer, but a pastor.

He attends to the crowd as they leave. And then he not going finally to sleep, but to spend the night in prayer.

[10 : 44] And for Jesus being left alone on land, is that a problem? We'll look at verse 47. Later that night, the boat was in the middle of the lake and he was alone on land.

He saw the disciples straining at the oars because the wind was against them. Shortly before dawn, he went out to them, walking on the lake.

After praying almost all night, he sees the disciples on the lake, struggling against the wind. And so he goes to them, walking on the lake.

And I wonder, as I read this, was the wind so severe that even after rowing all that time, Jesus or anyone could still see them easily, that would be a serious wind. Or maybe to the person who can multiply food from nothing and walk on water, to him distance is nothing.

[11:52] Maybe. Having grown up reading about the miracles of Jesus a lot, walking on water seemed less of a big deal.

But have you ever tried it? It's no mean feat. If you were wondering, you sink. The disciples had also seen this kind of thing from Jesus.

And now when he does it again, they are clueless and afraid. Verse 48 says, he was about to pass by them.

This doesn't mean he was trying to sneak around them, but that he was walking past where they were. But, verse 49, have a look. When they saw him walking on the lake, they thought he was a ghost and cried out because they all saw him and were terrified.

Immediately he spoke to them and said, Take courage, it is I. Don't be afraid. And he climbed into the boat with them and the wind died down and they were completely amazed, for they had not understood about the loaves, for their hearts were hardened.

[13:08] Once again, the ignorance and the blindness of the disciples is on display. They already know lots about Jesus, don't they?

He's wise. He has miraculous power. He can do things that only God can do. But they don't see or understand much more than that.

Not that Jesus is the shepherd of Israel and certainly not that Jesus is the God of Israel. Do you remember the Old Testament reading we heard from Job at the start?

Just listen to how Job describes God. He alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea. He is the maker of the bear and Orion, the Pallades and the constellations of the south. He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted. When he passes me, I cannot see him. When he goes by, I cannot perceive him.

[14:18] Jesus' followers knew and loved him. They wanted to be with him. They knew he was special. They knew that he had great power. But there was something missing.

There was something that they couldn't quite perceive. Because when they saw him walk on the water, despite what they knew, they couldn't see him.

They were terrified by him. They thought he was a ghost. So Jesus calms them. Take courage. Don't be afraid.

It is I. Jesus uses this phrase at times in the Gospels to make a divine claim. It's like him saying, I am.

They didn't realize that this human is God. God who existed before creation.

[15:22] God who spoke creation into existence. Have you? Have you? God who's been? Now you might say, well, can you blame them?

Like, he's just a guy. And you're talking about God. But listen to verse 51 again. They were completely amazed, for they had not understood about the loaves.

Their hearts were hardened. It's not their heads. It's not what they've experienced about Jesus. It's their hearts.

What's true about who Jesus really is has been made clear. But they refused to see it. They refused to accept it.

As a young leader at church, I knew lots about Jesus.

[16:24] I knew what he'd done for me, and I believed it. But like the disciples, my heart was hard. I hadn't got that Jesus was God, that he was my God, who demanded my whole life.

And only when I was finally confronted with handing over those parts of my life that I loved, and that I had been keeping for myself, then I began to realize what I was missing.

Whether you've grown up at church hearing lots about Jesus, or have come along in recent times, have you seen and believed that Jesus is God?

His wisdom is profound. His power is vast. He alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea.

How can mere mortals prove their innocence before God? The man Jesus is no mere mortal.

[17:46] Is this the Jesus that you know? Is this the Jesus that you follow and love? Have you realized that this is the Jesus that the Bible teaches, and that we are on about?

When I was figuring this out, I loved what Jesus had done for me, but I hadn't bowed down. I hadn't trembled before him. In other words, my life hadn't really changed because of who Jesus is and what I believed.

In recent weeks, we've been seeing the truth about Jesus, including lots about his power and character. And often the people around him, including those closest to him, have been amazed and afraid, but not willing to see and believe the truth about him.

Don't let this be true for you. Don't let your understanding or attitude about Jesus remain only at what you knew or thought of him in your childhood or what you heard or thought about him from movies and TV.

[19 : 19] See and believe the real Jesus, the shepherd God, the one who cares and protects and satisfies, the one who shapes and controls and conquers and saves.

And let your knowledge and love of him thoroughly, thoroughly affect who you are and how you live. How about I pray?

Heavenly Father, thanks so much for showing us the truth about yourself in the Lord Jesus. Let us see Jesus and know and believe the truth about him and about you.

Would you save us from complacency and let the truth about you