

Mark 6:30-52 (PM)

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[0 : 00] If you've got a Bible, do keep it open at Mark chapter 6, the passage that Joshua read a short while ago. Mark chapter 6, verse 30 onwards.

Well in 2016, I had the privilege of going to Israel. Israel! It was amazing! We turned up in Israel and everywhere we turned, there were reminders of biblical stories.

Places that I'd read about, each bringing to life. All that I'd read and understood. But there were several lessons that I had to learn.

Things that I just didn't expect. Things that were a little different. You see, I'm an Englishman and I come from the UK. And in England, when you hear about green pastures, rolling hills and sheep, this is the picture that you get.

Ah! There you go. This is what I think of. So when I turned up in Israel and I saw this, and was told this is a bit more like the green pastures you're likely to see, I was a bit surprised.

[1 : 08] A bit shocked. You see, I've been raised to understand that what shepherds do is that they whistle. And then they get their dogs, their sheep dogs, and they herd the sheep in, into their sheep pens like this, chasing them in.

Go on. Here's Shep. Here's Shep. One man and his dog. And then in Israel, I see this. The sheep know the shepherd's voice.

And they just followed. Amazing. But also, that's what we're told in the Bible. The sheep know the shepherd's voice.

Well, in Israel, we get a picture of what it's truly like. And as Jesus, in our story today, sees the crowd, what does he think?

Well, he thinks, what a bunch of sheep they are. Well, I confess, if someone calls me a sheep, I'm not really kind of proud of that.

[2 : 17] In fact, I'd rather not be called a sheep, thank you very much. I'd rather be called something a little bit different. Maybe call me a dolphin.

They're quite intelligent, aren't they? You can teach them to do some amazing tricks. Maybe call me a gorilla. Protective and strong. Got a couple of those in my family.

Or maybe just crafty. You can call me crafty, like a squirrel. I like to be a bit like a squirrel. In England, they're this color. And over here, they're black. It's strange when you see things a little bit differently.

But Jesus says, you're like one of these. He sees the crowd and says, you're like sheep.

Sheep without a shepherd. In today's passage, Jesus has got some strong words for us. For his training disciples.

[3 : 18] And we're going to see that in the middle of a storm or in the middle of a desolate place, we're going to need some humility. We're going to need some sheep-like dependency.

We need a shepherd. So turn back with me to the Bible passage. Have a little look here and you'll see the feedback. I think I'm making some noises.

Turn back with me to the passage. As the apostles, Jesus' 12 disciples, return from their adventures. You'll see in the previous section.

Let me look it up. Mark chapter 6. You'll have seen earlier on that the disciples were sent out. They were sent out by Jesus.

They were sent out with very little. Now that's what we get told at the beginning of chapter 6, chapter 6, verse 6 onwards. And he tells them to go out with no sandals, no extra tunic, no bread, no bag, no money.

[4 : 24] Go out. Why? Well, as they come back in again, it's a reminder that we depend, as we step out in faith, to depend on the shepherd who provides.

And that's what we're going to see in our passage today. Well, the passage starts with the feedback. All the disciples come back again. And did you spot that at the beginning of our reading? Mark chapter 6, verse 30. The apostles gathered around Jesus and reported to him all that they had done and taught. Isn't it really important to do that?

I don't know whether you've thought about it, but even this very service is an example of entrusting into the hands of young people. Sending them out and asking them to do something.

And then, at the end of it all, getting feedback. I'm sure you do it in your families, in a community, how important it is. That we entrust responsibility. That we send out and that's when they come back.

[5 : 24] That we feed back. And we encourage and we hear how things have gone. Well, I've got no doubt that Jesus, as he spoke to them, invited them to come to a quiet place.

A chance to get some proper feedback. How important it is to have that. But, in the middle of life, sometimes it's just a bit more chaotic than we plan.

And Jesus finds that. Look, verse 31. Seeking to withdraw, Jesus leads them to a desolate place. Only to see a crowd follow. They all follow. Crowds come.

Crowds come. And instead of Jesus going, hang on. You've had your time. I've done all the miracles. I need a bit of downtime with my disciples. Jesus sees them.

Sees the crowd. And sees that they are like sheep. Without a shepherd. Now, we've mentioned that no one likes being called sheep. But that's exactly the picture that we get of God speaking of his people.

[6 : 26] All the way through the Old Testament. Look with me at Ezekiel, chapter 34, verses 1 and 2. You'll see. Thus says the Lord God to the shepherds. Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves.

Should not the shepherds feed the flock? You see, Israel has had this really long history of being rubbish. Having really bad shepherds.

Being like sheep with no direction. You just need to read the Old Testament to see it time and time again. That's the picture. And God, even though he raised up shepherds to lead his people.

We get told here they're more worried about feeding themselves rather than feeding the flock. God knows that his people need shepherding. Compassion is his response.

It's no surprise. And compassion we see and teaching, verse 34. Compassion. Compassion. That sympathetic pity and concern for the sufferings and misfortunes of others.

[7 : 38] It's that looking at a sheep and going, ah. Ah. And what we get here is not the teaching that Jesus gives straight after.

We get two parables. And I believe that these two parables pretty much summarize the teaching that Jesus is giving. This picture of we are like sheep in need of a shepherd.

We get the feeding of the 5,000 and Jesus walking on water. So picture the scene. A desolate place in Israel. The crowds had assembled. They had listened.

But now they are hungry. Instead of sending them away or ordering a Domino's, what does he do? He tells the disciples to feed them.

Feed them. And the disciples' response is this. You're mad, Jesus. Come on. 600, or sorry, 200 days worth. A denarii is like a day's wages.

[8 : 36] So 200 days wages. That's what it is here. You must be joking, Jesus. Jesus. And then what we see is an amazing act of obedience. Jesus tells them just to collect what they have.

He only ever asks us to use what we've got. And then with what we've got, he then brings the transformation. And feeds enough for all.

Remember, Jesus has already sent them out with no supplies. And he's provided. This is just another example. Another example of Jesus going, go. But depend on me.

Rather on what you take with you. Once again, like sheep, they're being sent out. But being led, the disciples obeyed.

And God provided. And verse 42. We get told they all ate and were satisfied. They look up. And then there are 12 basketfuls. Fools of broken pieces.

[9 : 33] And of the fish. And those who ate the loaves with 5,000 men. Now take the picture and think about the original hearers. What would they think of when you talked about a desolate place?

What would they think of as a people got hungry? What would they think of as bread is provided? Enough bread for 12 basketfuls.

Wouldn't they have thought of the desolate wilderness? Wouldn't they have thought of Moses and the hungry and the way in which God provided bread, manna from the skies? Wouldn't they think of the 12 basketfuls? The 12 apostles representing the 12 tribes? You see, all of this is pregnant.

It's full of meaning. The teaching is there in the story. And what we see is this. Jesus is God. He's taking the place of God in the Old Testament.

[10:37] Jesus is God. But not only is he God, he's a better Moses. And not only is he a better Moses, we're going to find out that he is also the bread. A better bread.

Jesus' disciples are seeing. And being challenged. Will you be a better Israel? Will you be sheep who listen to their shepherds?

Well, the next story immediately. Mark takes us on. This time around, he takes us across the water. He's sent off the disciples. And dismissing the crowd, he goes to a quiet place to pray.

But the disciples, between 3am and 6am, we find them struggling on the water. The wind has picked up. And Jesus, seeing their struggle, verse 48, comes to them walking on the water.

And then I love this. Have you spotted what he does? He means to pass them by. Why would you do that, Jesus? That's totally illogical.

[11:45] You can see us struggling. Why don't you come and sort it out? And I think this is a powerful picture of what Jesus does to this day.

He doesn't, as soon as we start struggling, he doesn't step in and solve the problem. Often we need to struggle. It's at that point that we actually turn and we see our need of him.

We acknowledge that we need to be dependent on him, like a sheep to a shepherd. And then we see this brilliant picture. All the way through Mark.

If you've spotted so far, there's been this faith and fear. Have you spotted it time and time again? Jairus' daughter. The storm, the bleeding woman. Each time we've heard about, don't have fear but have faith.

And that's what we see in this passage. Verse 49. But when they saw him walking on the sea, they thought it was a ghost and cried out, Ah! Of course, their response is fear.

[12:52] But that is what we've seen. For they all saw him and they were terrified. But he spoke to them. And he said, Take heart. It is I.

Do not be afraid. In effect, don't be afraid. Have faith. That's the picture here. And how do we get from fear to faith?

Have you worked this out? How do we go from being fearful, particularly of situations and circumstances that we see, to a place of faith?

Well, the clue is in the phrase that Jesus says. Take heart. It is I. Do not be afraid. It is I.

I am. Again, in the Bible, it's pregnant. It's full of meaning. The picture here is, the Greek word is ego amy. It points us back to the time when Moses stood before the burning bush and God said, I am who I am.

[13:58] What is the difference between fear and faith? Jesus. He is the difference. And you see, with Jesus in your boat, as it were, with Christ in you, the hope of glory, you need not have any fear.

Perfect love drives out fear. And Jesus is love. Perfect love. So we just need to have faith.

In Deuteronomy 3, 31, 6, as Joshua is just about to take over from Moses, he is reminded these very words. Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them.

For it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you. How do we not be afraid of situations and circumstances?

How do we not be afraid of hunger when we've got nothing in our bellies? How do we not be afraid of a storm when it's there? Or a ghost or whatever it is that they might see? It is about Jesus being with us.

[15:07] That's the picture. It's about having the shepherd with the sheep. It makes all the difference. God goes with you. He will never leave you or forsake you.

Verse 51, we're told, Jesus got into the boat with them and the wind ceased. They were utterly astounded, for they did not understand about the loaves, for their hearts were hardened. What did they miss?

What did they not understand? That's what we're told. Why were their hearts hardened? Well, I think it's because as they thought about the miracle that Jesus had done, Jesus providing bread, they did not grasp that he is the bread of life that will truly satisfy them forever.

Not just the provider of bread. He is the one. He is the one. Not only to calm the storm, but to be with us through the storm.

In all situations and circumstances, Christ's presence with us can help us through. Jesus is God and it's about Jesus.

[16:20] It's all about Jesus. Jesus is the bread. Jesus is the bread. Jesus is this wave walker. He is the bread provider. He is working through you to meet the needs of others.

He is the bread provider. He is the bread provider. He is the bread provider. He is the bread provider. So the question is, is he in your boat as it were? If you want to take that picture. Is Christ in you the hope of glory?

Have you grasped that it's about not what we can do, but actually how much we trust in him and how he is with us in all circumstances?

Let me read to you a passage, John 6, verse 31. Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, as it is written. He gave them bread from heaven to eat.

And Jesus said to them, truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses that gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father that gives you the true bread from heaven.

[17:24] For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world. They said to him, sir, give us this bread always. And he said to them, what did he say to them?

Oh, yes, you know it. I'm the bread of life. I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will not hunger. Whoever believes in me will never thirst.

All I trust that Christ is at work, challenging you, changing you, that you become increasingly more dependent on him as the days continue. May you be more attached to Jesus in your phone.

May you depend on him. May you depend on him. Even more than you depend on your weekly wage or your friends at school or your family.

Be reminded we are like sheep, even though we don't like to think of it like that. Remind ourselves that we are dependent on him.

[18:31] We need to be led, protected, comforted. Let us have faith and not fear. Let's pray. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, how we want to fight against this idea that we are like sheep.

We look in the world and we see the sheep-like behaviour. We can see Facebook and the influencers. We can see how we love to follow and yet we think that we've evolved from this idea of being just sheep.

Thank you that you are our shepherd. Help us to be humble. Coming before you. Reminding ourselves of our dependence on you, even for our daily breath. Go before us.

And as you did to the disciples, send us out trusting in you. Thank you for Andrew. The example that he has given. But send us all out to our workplaces, to our schools, to our houses, to our homes, to our communities.

That we may also be a witness of the good shepherds. Amen.