

Lesson 2

When Desperation and Compassion Move Us

But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick. Matthew 14:13-14

Have you ever experienced a day that turned out vastly different than you planned? Perhaps you intended to complete a certain to-do list that day. Work. Family time. Fun time. Chores. Perhaps even tackle a long overdue project.

Then something unexpected detoured your plans.

Maybe it was a *someone* who altered your day's agenda. A call from a friend in need. A family member who needed a favor.

The crowd along the Galilean shoreline experienced an altered agenda once they spotted Jesus' boat. In fact, their plans changed so suddenly that they followed Jesus *on foot*. They didn't take time to arrange alternate transportation. They dropped what they were doing to follow after Him.

No one knew Jesus would be there. He had not scheduled a visit with an area event coordinator. No one booked a venue. He was not an expected guest speaker at a fancy banquet. Or an invited Bible study teacher that day.

Yet when the people saw Him, they flocked toward Him in droves. It didn't seem to matter how they got there. They just needed to get to Him without delay.

Desperation simplifies choices.

Take a moment to write out our study's memory verse - Matthew 14:14:



In this second lesson, we are studying Matthew 14:13-14, which states: *But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns. When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.*

We can almost picture that chaotic scene of an amassing crowd. We see it today when the paparazzi or avid fans follow movie stars and prominent sports figures wherever they go. Or perhaps we see it on television when a truck carrying food to an impoverished area arrives and the disruption that ensues.

Yet even with our modern-day examples, we cannot fully imagine this multitude of thousands, some sick and needing help, that descended on Jesus and the disciples. Such a sight must have staggered the senses.

The Crowd

The crowd (Greek, *ochlos*) in this instance refers to a confused throng. It is basically a multitude of people who haphazardly flocked together. They weren't an organized political party or a unified religious group. They simply desired to draw near to Jesus.

How many times is "the crowd" or "crowds" referred to in Matthew 14:13-21? _____

Although your count may vary according to which translation of the Bible you use, there are quite a few references in just those few passages, aren't there? The people constantly weighed on the minds of Jesus and His disciples. Frequent mentions in this miracle to "the crowd(s)" reveal how much Jesus esteems and cares about people -- in particular the hungry and poor of the world.

How do you view crowds in your church, particularly around holiday services?

We may find ourselves annoyed at crowds because they get in the way, slow us down, or force us to alter our routine.

Some Christians are more concerned about reaching the pew than reaching the lost.

Yet the heart of Jesus' message in this miracle reminds us that the Church is to be the church for the lost and hurting *of the world*, not just those with similar religious views or an acceptable level of faith and knowledge of Scripture.

Jesus' Response

So how did the crowd know which direction Jesus was headed? Since the Sea of Galilee is only 8 miles across, the crowds could determine Jesus' sailing destination without much difficulty. Even though Jesus desired to privately retreat with the disciples, the people followed Him to the other side of the lake.

Jesus had basically "punched out" from the ministry time clock to get away, rest, grieve, and spend time with the disciples. But He was interrupted instead. How would you feel? Sometimes, we may feel like punching out someone who punches us back in to work when we had other plans for our time, don't we?

When was the last time that you tried to get away only to see your plans thwarted?

How did it make you feel?

How did you react?

Our reaction may be an irritated, "Don't bother me. I've got other things to do." You and I choose our attitude. We decide how we will respond each time. An interruption may annoy us, but we have a choice regarding how we react.

Anger, impatience, and consternation tend to be common reactions to interruptions. But none of those reactions are helpful, *especially* when it comes to ministry.

How does Jesus respond to this interruption?

Mark 6:34 _____

Luke 9:11 _____

Would you have been as graceful? You may not hold down a paid ministry job, but as His disciple there will always be ministry for you to do. How do you know?

Because you're still breathing.

God still has a purpose to use your life for His glory. When we realize the desperate needs of those around us and in the world at large, it tempers our reaction toward compassion, love and kindness.

Thankfully, it is not Jesus' **job** to love us. He simply does. He welcomes the opportunity to love and connect with us in a personal relationship. Jesus did not view that crowd as one giant interruption. He saw it as an incredible ministry opportunity.

Jesus did not see human impertinence but pastoral opportunity. His heart went out to them. He had been working for two years to feed souls, now He extends His compassion to care for their bodies, as well.

The crowd swelled as it made its way along the shoreline toward Jesus. More people joined them from the towns along their route. But not everyone moved along easily. Among them were the sick.

The Sick

The word used for the sick (Greek, *arrōstous*) whom Jesus heals here is an adjective to describe those who were feeble, sickly, and without strength. This wasn't just a thrill-seeking crowd pursuing excitement or entertainment, although some of those people likely existed.

Human need played the biggest factor.

The last time you had a physical ailment, did it affect how quickly you were able to move around?

If so, did you have people assisting you?

Even though some in the crowd may have been quick to travel around the lake, we can safely conclude that it took longer for the sick and hurting to reach Jesus.

Those who were sick needed to make a special effort for that journey. No doubt many would have relied on help from caregivers and made a concerted effort to travel around the lake. The fact that they journeyed on foot speaks of their level of concern, as well as their hope of receiving healing when they arrived.

And they did.

Mark's account states that the crowd *ran on foot...and got there ahead of them* (Mark 6:33). Perhaps a strong headwind slowed down the boat so that some of the people had time to run around the lake and arrive ahead of Jesus.

However, we cannot assume that the crowd who outran Jesus and the disciples stood waiting on the shore before Jesus landed. John 6:3–5 reveals that Jesus arrived first and privately spent time with His disciples on the mountainside before facing the multitude.

No question about it, Jesus was popular. But not because He starred in a rock band or excelled in sports. What caused the crowds to follow Jesus in the following passages?

Mark 2:2-3 _____

Mark 3:9-10 _____

Mark 5:22-24 _____

Luke 5:1 _____

Luke 8:45-46 _____

For Jesus, the needs of people were ever present. There was always going to be sick, hurting, and lonely people following Him. Seeking Him. Desiring His healing touch.

That need still exists today in our homes, churches, schools, businesses, and elsewhere. I would venture a guess that you have been sick, hurting or lonely at some point in your life. Perhaps all three at the same time.

When was the last time you felt any of those?

How did you navigate through it?

Even though some in the crowd were sick and lame, what does John 6:2 reveal as the motive of many there? _____

Some people had not come to learn from Jesus or follow His teachings. Instead, they were watching the miraculous healings Jesus was performing.

They were there to see a show.

Think for a moment how you would respond. If you had planned to retreat and crowds pressed in on you with such shallow motives, would you be a bit frustrated? Maybe even a little bit angry?

Yet once again, we do not read that Jesus responded negatively to anyone in the crowd. He just kept healing and loving them out of His great compassion.

Following Jesus

In this miracle and others, Matthew's Gospel commonly connects two important occurrences: (1) crowds following Jesus with (2) miracles He performed in the presence of crowds.

What miracles did Jesus perform in these passages and who followed Him afterward?

Matthew 4:23-25 _____

Matthew 20:29-34 _____

Matthew alludes to the fact that those who followed Jesus frequently experienced the miraculous. For us that miraculous most certainly includes forgiveness, life, and salvation through God's precious means of grace. Are you as intent about following Jesus as the crowds in those verses?

What does following Jesus look like in your life right now?

The word *followed* (Greek, *akolouthēō*) used in Matthew occurs 92 times in Scripture, with the majority of the references specifically referring to following Jesus.

Rarely do we notice Jesus alone in Scripture unless He was seeking quiet times of prayer with His Father. Jesus seemed constantly surrounded by followers. People vying for His attention.

How do you see the multitudes following Him in these passages?

Matthew 13:2 _____

Matthew 15:30 _____

Matthew 19:2 _____

Mark 1:33 _____

Mark 2:13 _____

Mark 3:20 _____

Luke 12:1 _____

Shepherd and Sheep

Mark's Gospel records that Jesus saw the crowd as *sheep without a shepherd*. What do you believe is significant about that statement?

Jesus, our Good Shepherd, not only takes care of His flock, but models those behaviors to other shepherds -- namely those in ministry or church leadership positions.

Shepherds are responsible for taking care of the needs of their sheep. If you have a flock, you have responsibilities. It is incumbent on our churches to raise up, properly train, and encourage the next generation of shepherds.

What leadership principles are identified in 1 Peter 5:1-11? _____

Peter reminds us that leaders have an obligation to shepherd the sheep and pray for more shepherds. Jesus tells His disciples much the same in Matthew 9:37-38. Regardless of the passing of time, we receive those same instructions as His modern-day disciples.

Let's take a moment to ponder shepherding. God placed Moses as the shepherd over the Israelites for forty years. When Moses deliberated who should take his place to lead the people into the Promised Land, what type of person does he describe in Numbers 27:12-23? _____

God's people need shepherding. In 1 Kings 22, Israel is described as sheep without a shepherd. Doesn't that make you squirm?

Sheep without a shepherd can easily go astray.

How does Jesus describe Himself in these passages?

John 10:11 _____

John 10:14 _____

You and I would be lost sheep without our Good Shepherd. There are three shepherding principles we glean from Jesus feeding the five thousand:

(1) The need always exceeds the resources.

Left to our human understanding hurting people always exceed the number of people ministering to them. The needed finances exceed the finances we have. Ask any shepherd (pastors, ministry leaders) and you'll find that to be true. Our resources are always inadequate until we offer them back to God for multiplication.

(2) I am always inadequate for the task Jesus has before me.

Almost every leader God called felt he or she wasn't quite ready, adequate, or capable: Moses, Jeremiah, Isaiah, and David, to name a few.

If you are a leader in any capacity, have you ever felt similarly?

How did God prove adequate?

What does Paul remind us in 2 Corinthians 3:5?

(3) Jesus is always more than adequate in every task and challenge I face.

Ephesians 3:20 tells us, *Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us.* The disciples experienced first-hand that Jesus is more than adequate for their inadequacies. His provision faithfully overflows in abundance. We can rely on Jesus when we're humbly shepherding His sheep.

In this season of your life, do you find yourself in a shepherding role? In what capacity?

How do these three points lend insight into what God has called you to do?

Even though you may be His shepherd, you are also His beloved sheep. Loved, protected, and looked after with the greatest care.

As His sheep, we can always trust that our Good Shepherd will provide for our every need.

Compassionate Savior

Matthew 14:14 goes on to say, *When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.* Compassion is most powerful when accompanied by action. You and I might feel compassionate about many things, but unless that feeling is accompanied by action, it's not much help to those in need.

Jesus experienced *compassion* for the crowds. In other words, He suffered with them. He felt their pain and hurt. So He went toward them to soothe their hurt, heal their ailments, and feed their soul with His living water. He did not recoil or leave them hurting. His heart went out to them -- and so did His loving actions.

The word *compassion* (Greek *splanchnizomai*) refers to being moved in one's bowels. In other words, Jesus felt their pain in His gut. Even though He is God incarnate, Jesus was not coldly calculating and analytical in terms of the people's suffering.

Much like anxiety and trauma, compassion has an effect on our stomachs. It hits us in the gut.

When was the last time you felt compassion in your gut?

Did you act on that feeling?

What was the result?

God's heart goes out to those in need. It is not an issue of whether people will respond or reciprocate by believing; God's heart and help goes out to those in need *anyway*.

Jesus was infinitely compassionate. He cared about those who were suffering and hurting. Who or what do we see Jesus compassionate about in the following verses?

- Compassion for _____: Matthew 9:36, 14:14, 15:32
- Compassion for _____: Matthew 20:34
- Compassion for _____: Matthew 23:37
- Compassion for _____: Mark 1:41
- Compassion for _____: Luke 7:13, John 11:35

Jesus healed multitudes of people while He walked here. Exactly how many, we will never know. Time and again we see Jesus healing the sick, blind, lame, and paralyzed.

To give us a glimpse into the vast array of people Jesus healed, list who received His healing in these verses:

Matthew 4:23 _____

Matthew 8:3 _____

Mark 10:52 _____

Luke 7:21 _____

John 5:9 _____

John 9:6-7 _____

This list of people Jesus impacted merely scratches the surface. Pause and look over the words you wrote. Doesn't that offer you comfort?

When we hurt in *any* way, we can rest assured that Jesus is present at all times. We never find ourselves alone, forgotten or abandoned by Him.

Have you ever suffered a hurt that He's healed?

How did you recognize Him working and restoring you?

How has this changed the way you view hurting people around you?

Jesus experienced genuine anguish over the suffering of others, whether they were believer or non-believer, Jew or gentile, man or woman, young or old, or wealthy or poor.

May the same be said of His people.

Jesus performed some miracles as signs of His identity. He used other miracles to teach important truths. But in these passages, we see that He healed people because He felt compassion for them. Jesus was, and is, loving, caring, and feeling.

When you are suffering, remember that Jesus suffers with you.

We notice that Jesus healed the sick, but He also did something else simultaneously.
What does Luke 9:11 say? _____

In meeting the needs of this vast multitude, Jesus postponed His own need for rest, privacy, time alone with the disciples, and even time with His Father. He put the needs of those suffering ahead of His own needs.

That paints such a beautiful picture of our compassionate Savior! He needed rest, but compassion moved Him to serve (Mark 6:34).

What does Jesus' compassion qualify Him to be according to Hebrews 4:14-16 and 5:1-2? _____

Our High Priest and Good Shepherd never leaves us unloved or uncared for. John 6:3-5 tells us that Jesus secured a few hours of quiet time with His disciples on the mountainside where no one disturbed them. From this retreat, He came out and saw the multitude gathered below along the shoreline. That sight moved Him to act with compassion.

In spite of all the unbelief that Jesus encountered and His desire to publicly withdraw to be alone with His disciples, His heart was moved at the sight of those who had so rapidly and eagerly followed him.

No one asked Jesus to feed those thousands. He didn't have to. *He wanted to.*

He was concerned about their whole wellbeing -- body *and* spirit. In modeling that behavior, Jesus taught the disciples that He is enough for every situation they would ever face - and they would face much after He returned home to heaven.

Let's review our Bible memory verse for our study. Write out Matthew 14:14 once more:



Closing

Although He lovingly healed their bodies, Jesus cared infinitely greater about healing their souls.

The same is still true today.

Jesus has a very clear view of Hell. He experienced it while He hung on the cross. He victoriously marched through it in our behalf. He understands the horrors awaiting those who do not acknowledge Him as their Savior.

Even after He heals a body, it can become sick or cripple again because we live in a fallen world.

But when Jesus heals a sin-diseased soul, it is *forever freed* from sin's dominion and penalty. Such healing is given through His means of grace. In His resurrection, there is a time coming when both body and soul will be freed from sin in the Resurrection of the dead at Jesus' return.

Blessed assurance.

Close with prayer:

✠*Father, Your compassion stuns me. You are Creator of the universe and all it contains. You breathe and exhale galaxies. Yet You see me. And when I hurt, You are moved to compassion. You shepherd me with such care. Thank you so much, Father. Show me ways that I can demonstrate Your compassion and care to those around me. In Jesus' name, Amen.*✠

Notes

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DVD Listening Guide

Lesson 2

“Crowd” means a _____ or a haphazard _____.

Spiritual rubberneckers are those who just wanted to see a _____.

Those who _____ Jesus experience the _____.

Compassion refers to being _____ in one’s _____.