

He Had Compassion on Them

Matthew 9:36

⁶ When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

Starting with 4:23, Jesus has spoken grace and truth with authority in Israel. Many in the crowds are marveling, but most do not believe. And some—the Pharisees—have begun to set themselves in violent opposition to Jesus and to the reign of God. Despite this varied response, Jesus remains true to his ministry of compassion and salvation, and he keeps on traveling in Israel, fulfilling his purpose.

When Jesus sees these crowds, Matthew says that “he had compassion on them. Having compassion refers to the inner organs – heart, kidneys, liver, intestines, and lungs – and later spoke of them as the seat of emotions such as anger and anxious desire. The Latin literally means to “suffer with, to feel the pain and suffering of another.” Compassion comes from identifying closely with another.

The reason for His compassion is that “they were harassed and helpless.” *Harassed* has the meaning “to be flayed” – skin torn off -- which sometimes happened when sheep go through brambles or rocks.

Helpless meant that the sheep were thrown prone or exhausted. When sheep have a lot of wool on them it is easy for them to fall and not be able to get back up.

They needed a shepherd. Israel’s leaders should have been nurturing the people and guiding them to follow Jesus, but instead those leaders are blaspheming Jesus, declaring him to be in league with Satan.

With all that is going on in the world and in our lives, we may feel like we have been flayed. We may feel that all of things in life have left us feeling raw emotionally, mentally, physically and spiritually.

Thankfully through everything in life, Jesus is there with his ever-comforting compassion. He has been in our shoes and knows the struggles we may have. Second Timothy 2:13 says it well: *“if we are faithless, he remains faithful— for he cannot deny himself.”*

Jesus is our Good Shepherd and knows everything about us and what we are experiencing. What’s more, he knows what to give us at every turn in our lives.

Thank you, dear Lord for your everlasting compassion and faithful daily care. Help us to trust fully in your concern for us. When the situation presents itself help us to share your kindness with those around us. Thank you in Jesus name. Amen