

Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



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Sheep Without a Shepherd

People need leaders who can guide them effectively. But too many leaders lose sight of what the people need, leaving them lost and discouraged.

“But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd” (Matt. 9:36).

“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” (Mk. 6:34).

These are not parallel accounts of the same event, but separate occasions in which Jesus saw the people as lost and leaderless. This metaphor of sheep without a shepherd was common in the Old Testament (see Num. 27:17; 1 Kgs. 22:17; Zech. 10:2). It illustrated the need for — and dearth of — effective spiritual leadership among humanity.

Notice that when Jesus saw the lost condition of the people, His solution was to “teach them many things.” People’s lives are improved by teaching them how to deal with life, not by giving them handouts. Modern notions of social justice that tie human happiness to material possessions are based on a false

sense of compassion, and leave people just as starved as before.

Actually, the people for whom Jesus had compassion in these accounts already had shepherds who taught them: the scribes and Pharisees, the self-proclaimed guardians of the Law of Moses (Matt. 23:2-3). Unfortunately, their style of spiritual leadership was totally mismatched to the needs of the people. There was something deficient in their teaching that left the people spiritually destitute and lost.

The Sermon on the Mount highlights the contrast between the teaching of Jesus and that of the Pharisees (Matt. 5-7; see esp. 5:20). Again and again, Jesus contrasted “you have heard that it was said” with a higher, more meaningful standard of righteousness (5:21, 27, 31, 33, 38, etc.). Jesus was not expounding a new law here; there is nothing in what He spoke on this occasion that was not already revealed in the Old Testament. Instead, Jesus was bringing truth to bear directly on the lives of the people in a way that they had not heard before. He addressed topics they strug-

gled with on a daily basis: lust, anger, marriage, money, worry, forgiveness, private prayer, and so on. This was shepherding they could relate to. Some of it may have made them squirm a little, but it restored a sense of purpose and direction to their lives. The teaching of the Pharisees, on the other hand, concentrating as it did on outward forms and arcane legal minutiae, left the people discouraged and confused.

Those who seek to provide spiritual leadership today — specifically preachers and elders — should take this lesson to heart. Teaching on external forms and generic platitudes may sound very religious (and have a legitimate place), but a steady diet of it will eventually send people searching for something else. What people need is teaching that addresses, specifically and forcefully, the issues they live with every day. They need guidance on right and wrong attitudes, and the behaviors that spring from those attitudes. They need teaching that challenges them to be better people.

Sheep will respond to a shepherd who helps them grow.

— David King