

RESPONDING TO THE COMPASSIONS OF JESUS

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Scripture: Matthew 9: 35-38

Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."

Would you pray with me?

Almighty God, would You send Your Holy Spirit to help us understand Your Son and the words that He spoke and the attitude that He had, so we would be emulators of Him. And that we would be encouraged and inspired by these words today. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

I often say that for us to better trust and understand God, we need to be able to know His characteristics, to know His traits, to know the way in which He responds to us. In fact, I have mentioned this as we do the bible studies – at the end of every passage that you study, write a character trait of God that you find, because it helps you to understand Him better. When we come to the Lord, we come as an act of faith. We don't know too much about Him; we just know that we need to believe in Him. He's calling us, we accept it, and then we begin this journey with Him. But the call initially is for us to be saved, and for our transgressions or our sins to be taken care of, and that our eternity will be with Him in heaven. But this journey that we still have is a journey that we walk with Him, and it is in this journey that we require to know more about Him, to be able to trust Him.

So we get to know whether our God is a God of integrity. Why? Because when we know that He is a God of integrity, we know that we can rely on His Word. Then we get to know whether He is a God who is reliable. Because when we know that He is reliable, then we know that what He says He will do. Then we find out in other scriptures that He is a trustworthy God, and what that tells us is that we can trust Him in every situation of our lives. Then there are passages that tell us that He is such a loving God; so we know that He will not in any way harm us or try and let evil come upon us that will in some way bring us down or demean us or take away from us those things that He wants for our lives. He is a loving caring God. But God is also a compassionate God. He is a God who is moved with compassion. Time and time again, we see in the Old Testament, in the New Testament, how He is filled with compassion for His people.

What is the meaning of the word 'compassion'? The origin of the word helps us get the breadth and significance of compassion. In Latin *compati* means to suffer with. Compassion means someone else's heartbreak becomes our heartbreak; someone else's suffering becomes our suffering. True compassion changes the way we live. Throughout scripture we see that God is moved with compassion, that He is a compassionate God. In other words, what we are going through, He comes alongside of us and goes through it with us. We are never alone in the hardships of trials in the suffering of life, because He is a compassionate God.

I want to take us through the Old Testament and see the compassion with which God worked with the children of Israel. We read in 1 Peter 2 that we are a holy nation – a nation of priests, a chosen race – all of these things which were originally given to the children of Israel. Deuteronomy 14:2 says: *For you are a people holy to the Lord Your God. Out of all the peoples on the face of the earth,*

the Lord has chosen you to be his treasured possession. Yet we see how often Israel strayed from that path that God wanted them to walk. Yet, with so much of compassion, God pursued them, called them back, loved on them, saved them from so many situations. I want to give you just a few scriptures that outline for us the love of God.

Isaiah 30:18 – *Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you, and therefore, He will rise up to show you compassion; for the Lord is a God of justice, blessed are all who wait for Him.*

Isaiah 49:10 – *They will not neither hunger nor thirst, nor will the desert heat or sun beat down on them; for He who has compassion on them will guide them and will lead them besides springs of water.*

Isaiah 49:13 – *Shout for joy, O heavens! And rejoice, O earth! Burst into song, O mountains! For the LORD has comforted His people and will have compassion on His afflicted ones.*

Isaiah 54:10 – *“Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed,” says the LORD, who has compassion on you.*

Isaiah 63:7 – *I will tell of the kindnesses of the LORD, the deeds for which he is to be praised, according to all the LORD has done for us – yes, the many good things he has done for Israel, according to his compassion and many kindnesses.*

A compassionate God, beloved. And yet, as we look at history, God wanting His children to follow His laws, His precepts, to do what He wanted His children to do, we find that they just kept straying. There was evil that became so rampant that they went down to the depths of depravity in their responses, in the things that they did with their lives.

I love the way Charles Spurgeon put this. He says: “There was no way of saving us but by stooping to us.” God in heaven couldn’t stay in heaven. To be able to help us, somehow there had to be a stooping of His self towards earth in compassion to do something about a people He loved so much that He couldn’t bear to be distanced from them.

Spurgeon goes on to say, “To bring earth up to heaven, He must bring heaven down to earth.” And that’s what happened in the incarnation; Jesus came down to earth. For while we were yet sinners, Christ Jesus died for us. In the midst of our sin, God’s compassion for His people never stopped. For while we were in our sins, Jesus came down, took on flesh, became a human being, lived among us and then went to the cross – all for the sake of the compassion that He had for His children.

And as we look at His own life, we see how He was so moved with compassion. As He traversed this earth in the company of His disciples, as He moved with great compassion through the dusty streets of Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria, as He taught people, as He healed them, the bible tells us that He was moved with compassion.

As we saw in the scripture that we just read – where He looked at the people and He saw them as sheep without a shepherd, and He was moved with compassion. He told His disciples, “Beseech the Lord of heaven for workers, for the harvest is plentiful but the workers are few.” Moved with compassion!

We read in the gospels about John the Baptist being killed, and Jesus withdrawing to a secluded spot, about all the people following Him. And so He gets into a boat and moves away; but the crowds have seen Him. Then He comes back and He sees the people. The bible tells us that He feels compassion, and He heals their sick. Then in the evening, the disciples want to send them away, but Jesus feels compassion for them and feeds them – five thousand fed! (Matthew 14)

Then in Mark 8, we again read: I feel compassion for the people because they have remained with me now three days, and have nothing to eat. If I send them away hungry to their homes, they will faint on the way. Compassion!

Matthew 9:27-29 As Jesus was going out from Jericho, two blind men calling out to Him, "Have mercy on us, Son of David, have mercy on us." And Jesus stops and He asks them, "Do you believe that I am able to do this?" and they say, "Yes, Lord. we are." And He reaches out and touches them and says, "According to your faith, it will be."

Then, on an occasion, Christ and His disciples went to a city called Nain, some six miles south of Nazareth. As they approached the gate of the city, they were met with a funeral procession. A young man had died, his mother a widow was burying her only child. And Jesus saw this sad scene and He had compassion on the dear lady and He said, "Stop your weeping." Then the Lord came near to the bier and touched it. The bearers stopped. The Lord said to the corpse, "Young man, arise!" and the once dead man sat up and began talking.

And then we see Him weeping over Jerusalem, looking from Bethphage, in tears and saying, "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her. How often I wanted to gather your children together the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling."

Compassion, beloved, just flowing through Jesus. As He looked at all that was happening around Him, it broke His heart. Then, in His darkest hour in the garden of Gethsemane, as the people come, the chief priests and the soldiers come to take Him into custody, Peter draws his sword and cuts off the ear of the servant of the chief priest. And Jesus reaches down. What an act of compassion! He didn't have to do it, but He picks up that ear and puts it back and heals the servant. Oh what compassion!

Then with dying breath on the cross, He hears the penitent thief tell Him, "Remember me when You come into Your kingdom." Jesus takes all that He has to rise on His toes in agony and says, "Today, you will be with Me in paradise." Then He sees His mother and John – again so much love and compassion welled up within – and He said, "Mother, your son!" and "Son, your mother!". His last breaths, just compassion still flowing almost through those bruised wounds of His, oozing blood. Compassion, a desire to come alongside a hurting, broken, sinful world saying, "This is My life; I give it to pay the penalty of your sins."

Beloved, we look at Jesus and all we can see is how much compassion He had for you and for me. Yet, that is not the end, beloved. We read that now in heaven, still out of compassion, He continues to intercede for you and for me.

Hebrews 7:24-25 says *But because Jesus lives forever, He has a permanent priesthood. Therefore He is able also to save completely those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to intercede for them." Even now, interceding for you and me in the throne room of God.*

Hebrews 4:15-16 *For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have One who has been tempted in every way that we are, yet was without sin. Therefore let us approach the throne room with confidence.*

We don't have somebody who doesn't sympathize with us, who doesn't have empathy for our weaknesses. All that compassion still reigns even in heaven for you and for me.

So beloved, we see this God who is so compassionate, such a wonderful trait who wants to come alongside of us in the things that we go through and help us through them; a God who doesn't stand afar off – a compassionate God.

What does the compassion of Jesus mean to me?

It's in times like this where I've looked at scripture and I see some beautiful, immortal truths about God, and I'm just in awe of it, that I often hear the words of my seminary professor saying, "So what!" So what! And his point was this – somehow you have to answer the 'wo what' because otherwise, you will leave all of this out there and it will not in any way impact you. So what that God is a compassionate God, that we've seen it epitomized in and through Jesus. What does it mean for you and for me today? What does it mean for the person in the pew? I believe there are two responses to that question that I want to submit to you as we bring this time to a close.

This past week, as I was lying in bed one night, I was praying and I said, "Lord, what do You want me to speak on this Sunday?" and just like that, in my mind came the answer: The Compassion of Jesus. That doesn't happen very often; I wish it did. There are times when I agonize over what to preach, but it was just like that. I thought: Wow, Okay! And I went to bed and slept. No more discussion, no more thinking, asking God. I got up and began to work on this. The reason I share that with you is that there is great importance for you and me today about what the compassion of Jesus means for you. Because I believe that Jesus who was so compassionate when He walked on this earth with people all around Him is the same One. Again, we read in Hebrews 13:8 that He is the same yesterday, today and forever.

Response #1: Reach out for the compassion of Jesus.

I don't know whether you need to feel and know and be met with the compassion of Jesus right now. You're saying: If I need anything now, I need to experience His compassion. If Jesus is the same yesterday when He walked on this earth and He dealt with different people and asked different questions, then He is the same today for you and for me.

So I wonder whether some of us need to reach out to the compassion of Jesus and cry out to Him: Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me. Beloved, is that your cry today? Have you come into this service saying: "I need a touch from Him? I need to reach out and touch the hem of His garment or I'm done. I'm reaching the end of my tether. I don't have it in me. Jesus Son of David, have mercy on me." I wonder whether that needs to be your cry today. I wonder whether some of you are hearing Jesus ask you: Do you believe that I can do this for you? Often beloved, we believe that God is omnipotent and all of that. But when it comes to believing that God can make a change in us, in our situation, our circumstance, in our body, in our health, then we back off a little. And maybe today, you're hearing Jesus ask you: Do you believe that I can do this for you? Do you have that kind of faith in me that I can touch you?

Maybe at this time you just need empathy. You need to just sense Him and feel Him come close to you and say, "I'm here. I know what you are going through." You need to just feel the warmth of His embrace. Whatever you are going through, whether it is pain, heartache, grief, suffering, difficult

time, you're just saying, "Lord, I need to feel You this morning. I just need to sense that You are with me, because if I know You are with me, I can make it. But Lord, I need that reassurance today."

Or maybe, you're just tired, worn and exhausted, and you've been praying for something in your life for a long time, and you're just tired. You're saying, "Lord, I want You to intercede for me. Lord, it's breaking my heart. I have nothing more to give. I've brought this prayer to You for so long. Lord, would You take it from now. Would You intercede on my behalf?"

Response #2: Model the compassion of Jesus.

As we look at the compassion of God, we should try to model that as well. why? Because scripture tells us that.

1 John 2:6 *Whoever says he abides in Him ought to walk in the same way in which He walked.*

If you and I say that we abide in Jesus, then we need to walk just as Jesus walked, then we need to be compassionate people, walking with eyes of compassion, looking at a desperate hurting world all around us.

1 Peter 2:21 *For to this you have been called because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you might follow in His steps.*

It doesn't take a genius to realize that we live in a very fallen world, that there is pain and agony and suffering all around us – whether it is physical or emotional. Scars that have been created or carried for a long time, bruised people all around. Our call is to look at people all around us with eyes of compassion, just as Jesus did.

I love this song that was written by Henry Slaughter and then Gloria Gaither wrote the second verse, and it goes like this.

He lifted up the fallen man,
He gave the world a helping hand,
His heart was touched every time
He saw a soul in need;
Displaying kindness everywhere,
Mercy and love was His to share,
And like this Man of Galilee I want to be.

To be like Jesus, to be like Jesus,
All I ask is to be like Him.
All thro' life's journey from earth to glory,
All I ask is to be like Him.

His look of love went everywhere,
And lives were changed when He was there.
Hungry eyes and hungry souls felt His embrace.
He stooped to mend each crippled child,
His healing touch was strong but mild,
And like this Man of Galilee, I want to be.

To be like Jesus, to be like Jesus,
All I ask is to be like Him.

All thro' life's journey from earth to glory,
All I ask is to be like Him.

Beloved, that must be our response in light of the credible compassion that God has for you and for me.

Shall we pray together? And even as we pray, maybe you need to move into the compassion of God today with things that are upon your heart. I want to encourage you to do it. Maybe you're saying: I have never really looked at being a compassionate person, being like Jesus. I want to today, Lord, would You help me? Would you consider these two responses as we pray? Would you respond to the Holy Spirit right now?

Heavenly Father, would You hear the cries of those who right now are saying: Touch me with compassion Lord. I need something in my life; I need a touch from you. Lord, whatever it is, would You hear them as they cry; would You hear and respond Master? And Lord, to those who are saying: Help me to be like You, to reflect You, to emulate You. Help me to be a person of compassion like You were, Lord. would You answer that as well? Through Your Spirit, would You touch us Master, that we would begin to look with eyes of compassion on a troubled hurting world. Touch us through Your Spirit, in your beautiful presence. Lord Jesus, in Your beautiful name we pray. Amen.
