

Moved by Compassion

Revealing Christ's Heart

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Years ago, someone came into my office and said to me: “**You know what the problem with you is? You never admit you’re wrong.**” How would you respond to that, even when you know it isn’t true? It was good for me to be challenged since it gave me the chance to examine myself in the matter of humility. It made me think about my character.

A HEART QUESTION

So, let’s apply that character challenge to the topic for this conference: compassion. Evaluate yourself. Would you say that you are a compassionate guy? Would you say that your heart feels for others, or really softens? Often, as men, we fight hard against showing emotion and would rather die than be seen crying or be seen as soft. We tend to bottle things up. I know I do. Some people will pour out their grief when they lose a loved one. That doesn’t come naturally to me. I try to suppress grief, and over time throw it away. Not healthy, I know. But that’s how I am. Does that ring a bell with anyone?

I know it’s generalizing, but I still feel it’s fair to say that women tend to have warmer hearts. They feel strongly when others are hurting. They can put themselves in the shoes of others. They often sympathize with suffering people and make connections with them quite quickly. Their hearts go out to others when they struggle.

We tend to see things differently. If we see others in pain or suffering, our view of them is often determined by how we would deal with it: we would carry on. If there are problems, we have to fix them. If there are difficulties, we have to work through them. If there are losses, we have to accept them. We want to get things done. And if someone has a hard time, we tend to compare their situation with ours: “*I had to deal with that; why can’t he?*” or “*I got over that; why does she go on and on about it?*” And in that process, our hearts can so easily harden.

THE LIE ABOUT CHANGE

Now, maybe you have a niggling little voice that says: “*I should have a warmer heart towards others.*” Since you came to this conference, perhaps you are admitting there is a call for you to be compassionate. Being here means accepting that we should change. We read in the gospels of Jesus seeing people and being compassionate. Yet it is so easy to say – and I’ve heard this: “*Well, of course. He was perfect; I’m not. And in this life, I never will be.*” But you know it goes further than that. I cannot tell you how often I have heard men – often older men – say: “*That’s just not me. I’m not like that, and I won’t change.*” I won’t change. Or you hear this: “*I can’t change.*”

That is a lie. I can’t change. If you say that, you’re not making a statement about your character. You are minimizing the power of the Spirit at work in you. Look at what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 5:17: “*If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*” Godly creation is making something out of nothing. We are a work in progress, and we are being changed. But my question to you is: how? How can we change? How can we be compassionate men? It is simply not good enough to say we’ll never be that way.

So, we’ll do what Christians should always do: look to Jesus. When we think about Jesus in the gospels, we typically see Him as a sufferer. The Suffering Servant of Isaiah: meek, mistreated and misunderstood, hated and despised, moving from place to place, and often rejected – a man of sorrows who would end up beaten and crucified. But the Bible shows us in several ways that Jesus was no wimp. He was strong and full of courage, and when necessary, He moved towards danger – not away from it. He had great power and authority during His ministry: casting out

demons, curing people, calming storms at sea. It is no wonder He is called the “*Lion of the tribe of Judah*”. You don’t mess with a lion. So rather than seeing Him in weakness, think about Him in His strength – and that is what makes His compassion even more remarkable. An incredibly compassionate lion, with a heart of great love and care.

How totally different He is from others in this world who have power! They usually lack any kind of compassion. They’re focused on building armies, financial empires, and building countries. They are conquerors: focused and determined, with a goal. And they will not be sidetracked in any way, nor will they let anyone get in their way. Just run them over.

THE COMPASSIONATE CHRIST

But Jesus was different. Full of power and authority – yes! The Son of the living God – yes! But see an amazing side to Him in His compassion. A key verse is Matthew 9:36 says: “*When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them.*” Compassion. The gospels use this word only with the Lord Jesus, and only a handful of times. But each time with the Lord Jesus, something happens. You can translate it as: “*He was moved with compassion.*” Moved. It means that compassion was a driving force in His life. And I’m going to list 3 times we read of Him having compassion. He saw a leper, and He was moved to compassion. He saw two blind men, and He was moved to compassion. And – as we saw - He saw the crowds, and He was moved to compassion. This shows us the heart of the Lord Jesus. No cold detachment. No indifference. Moved with compassion.

What is this all about? Let me ask you: was this something new in the heart of Jesus, of God? An exception to exceptional circumstances? And the answer is no! Our unchanging God has always had a heart of compassion, and we see this all through the Old Testament. The word most often used for compassion is striking. It is connected to a mother’s womb: to feel deep inside you. Not distant or clinical, but deep, tender, heartfelt love. The Lord says in Isaiah, “*Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb?*” That is how God speaks about His compassion – not cold sympathy, but love from deep within.

And Psalm 103 adds another picture: “*As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him.*” The Lord says even to His straying people in Hosea: “*All my compassion is aroused.*” So, when the Bible speaks of God’s compassion, it describes something rich and personal – the deep tenderness of a parent toward a suffering, hurting child. A heart that must do something. That is the compassion we see in Jesus.

SELF-FOCUSED HEARTS

Jesus looked at the people, and His heart was *moved*. The term ‘*moved*’ means affected in such a way that you are *motivated to loving action*. That’s what it means. Not just a feeling. Moved. Compassion moved Jesus’ heart. Let me ask you: what moves our hearts? Our hearts can often be inward-focused. We are often moved by what is good for us personally. Moved by what gives us pleasure or a sense of fulfillment. Moved by what makes us look or feel better.

Our hearts are often moved by wrong things – evil desires. And then when we see someone in a tough situation, all kinds of different thoughts can come up. *It’s not that bad. Toughen up. You’re hopeless.* Ever get irritated by someone coming up to you asking for cash? Annoyed when you see a homeless person in your way? Disgusted when we see a drug addict using? Or closer to home, irritated with someone in our church, or even in our family. Frustrated with a wife or with children. There can be a real hard-heartedness to how we see others – especially when we think their suffering is their own fault.

MOVED TO ACT

Let’s go back to that text in Matthew 9:36 and consider the whole verse, because it shows why Jesus was moved by compassion: “*When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless,*

like sheep without a shepherd." This is why His heart felt such sorrow and care. What are we talking about here? The vulnerability of the people. Sheep without a shepherd are sheep who are in great danger. I read that goats can manage by themselves, but sheep cannot. Without a shepherd, they are vulnerable to attack. Predators can rip them apart.

But even if there are no predators around, they aren't good at finding food and water. They're lost and there is nothing in themselves they can do to make things better. They're stuck. The text says "*they were harassed and helpless.*" Harassed: filled with difficulty and under strain. Feeling isolated and in pain, lonely. Helpless: no way to make things better in and of themselves. Jesus looked at those people, and His heart went out to them.

On a certain level, you might say that they were to blame for their situation. You can't blame God for the results of sin. Ultimately, what we suffer is our own fault. No one before God *deserves mercy*. But you see, brothers, that's the power of God's love. He moves beyond *fault or blame*. That's hard to do! We tend to fixate on fault and blame. But God can move past that because His love is so great! Jesus' heart was filled with love for these poor, lost people.

HARASSED AND HELPLESS

Spiritually speaking, they were lost. Spiritually speaking, they were dead. And there was nothing they could do to rescue themselves. They had no ability to find what they needed. *Harassed and helpless*. He sees blind men, whose blindness made life so hard for them. He saw a leper who was isolated and alone, with a decaying body. He saw crowds who were hungry and couldn't get food. And what did He do?

He did not move away from them. He was not disgusted with their condition and He did not try to distance Himself from them. Sometimes our natural reaction to those who are really suffering is to separate ourselves from them. *Yuck! Gross!* We can cringe at people and think: *forget it!* Not Jesus. He heals the blind men. He touches the leper and heals him. He provides food for the crowds – He kept going until all were filled. And for the spiritually lost? He sends the gospel.

And I want you to see, brothers, how life-changing receiving God's compassion can be. Compassion changes lives. The blind man would've suffered brutal limitations and probably, in some ways, felt useless. Jesus' compassion opened new opportunities for him. That's what compassion does. Lepers were lonely and isolated, with severed relationships. Jesus' compassion brought them into fellowship with others. That's what compassion does. The hungry and wandering were lost. Jesus' compassion gave them peace and contentment. That's what compassion does. You see how powerful compassion really is?

HE MOVES TOWARDS US

His heart was moved with compassion. Jesus moves toward the lost. You know, at one point early in Jesus' ministry, He was eating with Levi the tax collector and other tax collectors and so-called sinners. And the Pharisees grumbled, disgusted with Jesus' behaviour. And He said to them: "*I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance*" (Luke 5:32). He came "*with compassion to seek out the lost, the suffering, the desperate.*" I think we can say that even before Jesus came to earth, "*He was moved with compassion.*" That's why He came here, also knowing that it would lead Him to a place, on the cross, when He would receive from His Father no compassion. He would hang there for hours, receiving no compassion. Rejected, abandoned, harassed and helpless.

And when you look at the pictures we see painted of Jesus in the gospels having compassion, the point in the end isn't to think about what Jesus does for those people. It is also to see ourselves in the sick and suffering. The blind men? We are by nature spiritually blind, and we would never see Jesus for who He really is. Once Jesus healed them of being blind, they saw Him physically, but hopefully also spiritually. The leper? Jesus gave him a new life – not just physically, but also spiritually. The crowds without food? Jesus gave them not only physical food but

also showed Himself to be the Bread from heaven – true spiritual food for their souls. The crowds - harassed and helpless? Once they heard and believed the good news of Jesus Christ, they had a Good Shepherd to guide and lead them forward through life. Those are all things we need.

In all those examples, Jesus moved to help with great compassion. The gospels say it again and again. He saw them, and He was moved. He saw the leper and was moved. The blind men and was moved. The crowds and was moved. He sees you, brother! Not at your strongest. Not at your best. But by nature: lost and struggling. He sees your sin and shame. He sees our shortcomings. He knows how lost and helpless we are. But He has not written you off. He has not backed away in disgust or in anger. Rather, He is moved with compassion, and He has moved *towards you* in His great love!

And that's what I want you to really focus on, more than anything else. Because that is the only thing that really changes us. Seeing that Jesus has compassion on us. Jesus has compassion on *you*. It takes compassion to love men like us, with all our brokenness and the ugliness of our sin. And when we look honestly at how we have sinned, we can think of a million reasons why Jesus would want nothing to do with us. But He took compassion on you and loves you deeply! His heart was moved. Will that move your heart?

CHANGED BY GRACE

What makes a man - a man of compassion? It isn't about having the right checklist. It isn't about having the right will power, or persistence. It isn't having the right personality type or the right character. It is always, first and foremost, standing in awe of the love of Jesus for you. And we say: *I was lost. I was blind. I was helpless. I was all alone. But Jesus searched for me. He found me in my sin and my brokenness, and He loved me.*

Earlier, I mentioned that the word for compassion is related to the womb – love from the heart. There's an amazing image in the book of Ezekiel 16, where the Lord describes his sinful people like a child abandoned at birth. *"On the day you were born your cord was not cut, nor were you washed with water to cleanse you...no eye pitied you, to do any of these things out of compassion for you, but you were cast out...for you were abhorred...and when I passed by you and saw you wallowing in your blood, I said to you in your blood: Live!"* God says: *"I love you!"*

In Christ we have life. And it is the love of His heart that changes our hearts, so that we become men of compassion. When His compassion takes hold of us, we begin to see people differently. The poor are not just lacking money; they are vulnerable. Those addicted to substances are not just making bad choices; they are harassed and helpless. The lonely are not just weak; they are like sheep without a shepherd. Family members and friends who struggle, members of our churches – they need to be shown compassion. And when we begin to see others like that, we do not pull back in irritation or indifference. We move toward them in love.

A CALL TO COMPASSION

So, we must pray that God would move our hearts as well. By His Word and Spirit, He softens what is hard in us and teaches us to reflect the compassion of Christ. Not perfectly, not instantly, but truly.

Let me leave you with this question: when you see the struggling, the lonely, the weak, or the difficult, what will rise in your heart – irritation, indifference, or the compassion of Christ?

Because when Jesus saw the crowds, He was moved with compassion. Jesus Christ, a Man of Compassion. And by His grace, that is the kind of men He is calling us to be.