

Compassion: More Than Words Series, P2

October 11th, 2015

I want to start this morning by asking you a question... *"Who is the most compassionate human being who ever lived in history?"*

- Now, just in case you're the kind of person who tends to over-think a question, let me just tell you that **this isn't a trick question!**
- If you had to answer, *"Who is the most compassionate human being who ever lived?"* who comes to your mind?
- Remember, this is church, so **you can never go wrong** with saying "Jesus!"

Truth is, the impact of Jesus Christ on this world is no doubt greater than any human being who ever lived.

- In fact, **who He was** and **what He's done** has **gotten woven so deeply** into our lives & culture, that in many ways,
- even **those of us who worship Him** don't realize just how absolutely profound His impact has been.

As much as many **people dismiss** so much truth about **who Jesus is** and **what He's said**,

- The **one thing they always seem to embrace** is His amazing heart of compassion.
- That He was **Someone who stood out in history** for having **loved more than through His words** alone.
- You certainly **don't have to go very far** in the New Testament to see this for yourself.

One day, for example, **a leper approaches Jesus on his knees**, begging for help. *"If you're willing, Jesus, please heal me!"*

- As you probably know, in that day, someone with leprosy was someone to be shunned, let alone helped.
- But, Jesus, **filled with compassion**, touches Him and says, *"I am willing... be clean!"*
- He could have healed the man first and then touched him... but not Jesus, who put His hand on this leprous body & healed him.

In **Mark 5** there's a demon-possessed guy. Nobody will have anything to do with him.

- **But, out of the crowd came Jesus**, who had compassion on him and heals him.
- In **Mark 9** he has **compassion on a tormented son** of a desperate father... a person everyone else fears. But not Jesus.

In **Matthew 20**, two blind men are crying out to Him. The crowd is telling them, *"Be quiet. Why should He pay attention to someone like you."*

- But Jesus didn't see them the way everyone else did. We're told Jesus had compassion on them and healed their eyes.
- In **Luke 7** there's a widow who's weeping over the loss of her son. It's a real tender passage.
- It says that *"When the Lord saw her, His heart went out to her and He said, 'Don't cry.'"* And He restored her son to her.
- But it's **not only in healing stories** that you see His compassion.

One day a **woman is caught in adultery**, and you think Jesus, as a religious leader, will really go after her. And yet, he stands up for her.

- Some time later, there's a **tax collector named Zacchaeus**... a man seen as the very dreg of society... who had gone out of his way to try and see Jesus.
- And yet, knowing the response he'd get from the religious leaders, Jesus says, *"Zacchaeus, I'm going to go to your home!"*

You see this compassion **even in the parables He shared**. He **spoke once about a wayward, prodigal son**, for example,

- **Who shamed his father** by asking for his inheritance while his father was still alive.
- After squandering every penny of it, he decides to go home.
- And **even though his father should've been furious**, we're told that, the moment his father sees him, that he was filled with compassion.
- And so... He runs to his son, throws his arms around him, and kisses him.

Truth is, **you can't read the life of Jesus** without asking, "*What made this man so compassionate?*"

- Now, in a lot of ways, I think a lot of people today understand Jesus' compassion **as being rooted in the fact** that He was one of those highly sensitive feeler-types...
- a kind of **tender, hippyish**, emotional guy who just can't stand to see or experience pain.

And yet, **that image of Jesus** simply doesn't hold up to what else we read about Jesus in the Gospels.

- When **those in power**, for example, would **mistreat the powerless**, Jesus would always come to their defense.
- One time, while at the temple, **Jesus made a whip out of cords**, and drove a whole bunch of folks from the temple area. *Jn 2:15*

He **scattered the coins of the money-changers**. He overturned their tables. He said, "*Get out of here!*"

- "*How dare you turn my Father's house into a market?*"
- Show of hands... **How many of you got so mad this week** that you threw furniture around and went after somebody with a whip?

Anybody do that? Jesus did that; the Jesus of the Bible who is so compassionate.

- He **said to leaders** of the religious establishment one time, "*You snakes, you brood of vipers, how will you escape being condemned to hell?*" Matthew 23:33
- Now that is not the kind of language that highly sensitive touchy-feely people tend to use. **How can this guy be that guy?**

You see, Jesus' compassion didn't come from a **squeamish, highly sensitive, emotional nature**. It came from something else.

- It came from something deeper. **It came from what Jesus saw when He looked at human beings.**
- ****And what Jesus saw would change the way the world viewed individual human beings.****

I'm sure you've noticed that when **somebody gets really good at something**, it changes what they're able to see.

- A **talent scout**, for example, can look at a **baseball swing or a golf swing...**
- and just **recognize an exceptional gift** the way the rest of us probably can't.

That's what **Mastery** does. Great confidence & great expertise always involves a gift of perception:

- **being able to see what other people don't see**, even though they're looking at the same stuff.
- You see, **Jesus mastered human relationships**. Therefore, when Jesus looked at somebody, He saw something,
- and **what He saw in them was the image of God**.

He **never looked at a person without seeing the image of God**. And, every time, it would pierce His heart.

- He would see a **leper**, or a **prostitute**, or a **beggar**, or somebody **despised**, a **tax collector** or a **Gentile...**
- **He would see it even in those who were beating Him and having Him crucified.**
- **and He would think...** *Oh God, oh Father, through Your image in them, You have crowned this one with glory and honor. You have made this one ruler over the works of Your hands even though they are **disguised right now as a leper, or a tax collector, or a prostitute.***

He would treat these people like they wore a crown, like they were the children of royalty.

- There's a great Christian writer **George MacDonald...** He lived about 100 years ago, and he **often wrote about princesses**.
- Somebody asked him, "*Why do you do that so much?*" And he said, "*It's because every little girl is a princess.*"
- **And he wasn't being metaphorical** around that. He said, "*If you think about it, a princess is the daughter of a king. A prince is the son of a king. Together, that's every human being who is made and loved by God.*"

If you're a woman here, married or single, young or old, you need to hear this. You're the daughter of a king.

- **If you're a man**, whatever scars you bear, whatever wounds you carry, you're the son of a king!
- Jesus treated everybody like they were the child of the King.

And most people, especially the poor, the sick, the sinners, were **not used** to being treated this way. And, they're still not!

- But, **you can still be part** of Jesus' movement to change the world by the way you see the people you walk past every day.
- We talked, last week, about how the Old Testament speaks, over and over again, about the fatherless, the widows, and the aliens.

When He's talking to Israel He says, "*You be real careful about how you treat widows, orphans, refugees, and the poor.*"

- He repeats this through Scripture, because **in the ancient world**, there's no support system for them.
- Without support, they're going to get trashed.
- And so, God intervenes... "*I made them and I love them. And so, if you're part of My community, than you need to especially look out for people like this who are going to get trashed.*"

Religious people in Jesus' day assumed that, to be religious, you should have nothing to do with the marginalized and the outcasts.

- **But Jesus** says, "*No! Being a person after God's heart means I especially seek out and care for people like these.*"
- The **blind**, the **disabled**, the **deaf**... they were thought to **not reflect God's glory & majesty**. And yet, Jesus has a special heart for them.

He cared for those who were the **victim of social or religious bigotry**... like the Romans & Samaritans.

- He had a special heart for people who were **thought to be inferior**... from tax collectors to women caught in adultery.
- **Religious leaders shunned them**... But Jesus welcomed them. **He didn't condone**... but He embraced & loved them...
- Those who were at the bottom of the social status: women, children, Gentiles. Jesus treated them **like they were on top**.

In His **teachings** and in His **life**, Jesus is saying *"The world's treatment of humanity has been weighed by my Father and has **been found seriously & painfully wanting**. And now the Kingdom of God has become present through Me, through My life, through My body, and now every human being who comes to Me with an open heart will know their value... that they're worth laying down even my own life."*

I want to challenge you with this... **go through the New Testament...** go through any ancient texts you can find (sacred or otherwise),

- and **see if you can find anyone like this Man** we worship.
- This **heart of His... the way He sees people, marks every encounter He has!**
- They're not always encounters that make everyone He meets "feel happy," but He always takes them seriously.

In **all that He does**, there's this **honoring**, this **regard**, this **respect** for each and every person He passes by.

- In all of His **healings**; in all of His **conversations**; in the **heroes of His parables**;
- in all the **stories of all the controversial people** Jesus chose to sit down with and embrace... from tax collectors to prostitutes;
- over and over again we see how **He's engaging & embracing** the marginalized.

Through each and every story we read in the Gospels, we're seeing just how Jesus He is **lifting the lowly up**,

- how Jesus is **expressing a sense of worth & dignity** to those who have been shunned & ignored.
- Through all of it, **He's welcoming lost ones home**.

And **this vision of humanity**... Jesus' vision of all those people He passed by each and every day...

- His compassion and love for each and every person YOU pass by every day, **has captured the moral imagination** of the world.

- Jesus' very life reflected the words of Scripture, that every human being, **every individual has this embedded worth**, this rich potential... whether you know them or not.

And the Biblical foundation for this is rooted in the idea, again, that every human being is made by God.

- That we're not a bunch of random blobs of tissue and cells...
- That each of us were, as **Psalm 139:14** says, "***Fearfully and wonderfully made.***"
- That **we were all carefully thought out**, and that we all **mirror a divine image**... His image, the **Imago Dei**.

So, when you see them... **when you see all those unique faces at work or school or at the mall...**

- When you see all those people... the **beautiful**, the **strange**, the **quirky**, the **strong**, the **weak**, the **young**, the **old**, the **disabled**, the **abandoned**, the **persecuted**, those **who believe**, those **who don't**...
- When you see them... **if your heart is working right**; if **fear isn't keeping you from seeing** what He sees,
- It'll hit you... "*My God! They're all made in Your image. They're all beautiful in your eyes... they're all perfectly loved by You!*"

And that tremendous worth that Jesus saw in each of us, led to the ultimate expression of His love. In **Romans 5:8** Paul says this.

- ***"But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."***
- It's one of the reason why the world needs a church that reflects the Father heart of God...
- Because, **it's the love of God that alone can safeguard, protect, and maintain the value** of every human being.

Now, don't get me wrong... I'm **not talking about the kind of love** that tells a child, for example,

- That they can **eat all the junk food** they want. Or, that they can **jump on the furniture** or **watch whatever they want** on TV.
- That's **not love... that's appeasement**... nothing life-giving!

- The **kind of love Jesus modeled and called us to** was a selfless, sacrificial love that **offered people a new identity...** a new life.
- And it's that kind of love that He's called us to!

Now, of course, the Church hasn't always lived up to that calling. But, in the remaining minutes of this message...

- **I want to tell you some of the ways it has.**
- And as I do that, I'd like for each and every one of us to ask God this simple question...
- *"God, how would You like me to be **tangible expression** of Your love & compassion as I live out my every day life?"*

I'll tell you, back in the ancient world, if you **got sick**, and you had **no money**, and you **weren't related to a family** who could care for you, you were toast!

- In **165 A.D.** there was an epidemic. It might have been smallpox. It wiped out a quarter of the population in Rome.
- In fact, Emperor **Marcus Aurelius** died from it.
- Then **another one hit around 250**. It wiped out up to a third of cities in the Roman Empire.

Can you **imagine the panic** that went on? It was ugly. What happened to people was ugly.

- Greek historian **Thucydides** writes about how people in Athens responded during one of the plagues.
- This is what he writes: *"They died with no one to look after them. Indeed there were many houses in which all the inhabitants perished through lack of any intention for care. The bodies of the dying were heaped up, one on top of the other."*
- The pantheon of Greek gods had no impact on any of this because **none of the gods that the Greeks worshipped** ever said anything about an obligation or necessity to care for the sick.

But **there was this one community** of people who understood that they followed a Man who embraced unclean lepers...

- A man who told His disciples to *"Go out and heal the sick."*

- There's an ancient writing from **Dionysius** about what happened during those plagues.
- *"Heedless of the danger, they (the followers of Jesus) took charge of the sick, attending to their every need, and ministering to them in Christ. And with them departed this life serenely happy, for they were infected by others with the disease, drawing on themselves the sickness of their neighbors, and cheerfully accepting their pains."*

Once there was a little community of men and women; **no money**, **no power**, but they remembered One who spoke these words:

- *"I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me... Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me."*
- In spite of the dire circumstances, they apparently saw those around them differently than every one else did.

They saw the presence of Jesus in the **lowliest**, most **humble**, most **hurting**, and most **alone**.

- And they chose to join with Him in His ministry of love and compassion.
- In the **300s** a **follower of Jesus by the name of Basil** (18:28) got this idea.
- You know in the ancient world, leprosy was a death sentence.
- **If you became a leper**, you'd literally have to yell out, *"Unclean! Unclean!"* so nobody would risk touching you.

Basil had this idea. He thought, *What if we build a place to love and care for lepers? They don't even have to pay for it. We'll raise the money.*

- One of the **most famous sermons in that century** was by his brother, **Gregory of Nyssa**, and it was to raise money for this place to take care of those with leprosy.
- And, in that sermon Gregory said: *"Lepers have been made in the image of God."*

Just **think about what impact those words might have had** on the ancient world! Gregory goes on...

- *"In the same way you and I have... let us take care of Christ while there is still time. Let us minister to Christ's needs. Let us give Christ nourishment. Let us clothe Christ. Let us gather Christ in. Let us show Christ honor."*
- By the way, that's the **beginning of what would come to be known** as hospitals (hospice/hospitality).

Starting back in the early part of the **4th century**, leaders of the church would gather together.

- And at the first one, at the **Council of Nicea**, it was agreed that **wherever a cathedral would be built**, they would also need to build a place where the sick and poor could be cared for.
- By the way, that's why, even today, so many hospitals have names like *"Good Samaritan,"* or *"Good Shepherd."*
- They became the world's first charitable institutions.

In **1347, Europe was struck by a force** they couldn't even begin to fight against... it was the Black Death, Bubonic Plague.

- Almost impossible to believe, over 1/3 of the population of Europe was killed.
- Of course, one of the reasons it spread so fast was that as soon as it reached one village, the people would try and escape to other villages...
- Not knowing they themselves were already infected.

But, through all of this, there was one group of people who chose to remain in every infected village in order to **share the Gospel** and **bury the dead**.

- And, as a result, while a third of Europe died, **5 out of every 6 Franciscan friars** died.
- 80% of every Franciscan Friar throughout Europe died.
- 120,000 in Germany alone **as they sought to walk in the footsteps of Jesus**...
- reflecting His love and compassion to those around them, **whom they looked at with great worth** and dignity.

Many Centuries later, there was a follower of Jesus by the name of **Henry Dunant** who, as a Jesus follower,

- was compelled, **in 1859**, to minister to the countless soldiers left wounded on the **battlefield of Solferino** in Italy.
- That led to an incredible medical ministry... and **then an amazing organization** that became known as **The Red Cross**.
- You see, every time you see the Red Cross, **you're seeing another thumbprint of your Savior** in the world.

A 19th century Jesus-follower named **Theodor Fliedner** trained a group of mostly peasant women to nurse the sick,

- and this led to a **movement of hospitals** all over Europe, and this inspired a young woman named **Florence Nightingale** to give her life to care for the sick.
- And **just before she died she had one request**, that on her grave stone "*Could there just be a cross of Jesus with my initials?*"
- She didn't want her name to mark the grave, because **she wanted to serve the hero of her faith**, Jesus, with no acclaim.

I think you realize that **I could speak for hours** and hours, offering countless examples like these.

- But understand that the notion that every human being, regardless of their **ethnic/racial background**, **intelligence**, **status**, or **wealth**...
- that **every human being** is of **immense, sacred, equal worth**, and has an **equal claim on my compassion**...

Understand that **these truths are not automatically a part of every culture** on this planet!

- Instead, it's an idea that **came to our world largely through a penniless carpenter** who lived 2,000 years ago.
- And, as a follower of this Carpenter, **I wonder where He might want you & me to be an expression of God's compassion**.

In the ancient world, **masters literally had the power of life and death** over slaves.

- And yet, the Apostle Paul once said, *"Now in Jesus there is no longer slave and free. No longer male and female. No longer Jew and Gentile. We're all just one. We're all one in Him... sons and daughters of a King."*
- You **tell me anywhere else in the ancient world** where anybody was saying anything like that.

It **took a long time, but over time**, followers of Jesus, when they would look at social structures, would begin to say,

- *"You know, I don't think slavery is the right way to reflect the worth of every human being."*
- A guy named **John Newton**, who **made his money buying and selling** human beings as slaves met Jesus... and he never saw people the same.
- He ended up becoming a pastor and a hymn-writer. He wrote a song called "Amazing grace." *"How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me."*

Then there's a politician named **William Wilberforce** who became a follower of Christ. And he came to John Newton for career advice.

- He said, "I think I'm going to get out of politics. It's kind of a dirty business."
- Newton said, *"No you ought to stay and devote your life to the abolition of the evil of slavery."* And Wilberforce did.

In the ancient world, **when a child was born**, it could simply be left to die, no questions asked.

- In a way, babies & infants were **seen almost as disposable...** especially if they had any defect whatsoever... or, even if it the baby was the **wrong gender**,
- We're **told by Roman writer, Seneca**, that if they weren't wanted, than very simply... they would be drowned.

You see, in the ancient world, **abortion, infanticide, selling into slavery**, these weren't scandalous things to cover-up.

- It's just **the way the world worked...**
- **Except for this growing Jesus community** whose leader told them, *"Don't keep the children away. You let them come to Me,"*

and put His hands on them and blessed them.

They remembered **they followed One who said**, "*Unless you become like a child, you cannot enter the kingdom of heaven.*"

- **Nobody was doing or saying that** in that world. So **they said**, "*We'll love little children, even if they're not ours.*"
- So, the early followers of Jesus decided that they would take care of them if their parents die... even if they're not related.
- That was **the beginning of what would come to be called orphanages.**
- They understood from Jesus that **everyone matters** to God.

So, let me ask you... as you purpose to walk with Jesus, what do you think Jesus might be asking of you today?

- You see, whenever we see another human being in need, whether they're amongst the "haves" or "have-nots",
- whether **we know them or not**... whether they have anything that could benefit us or not... whoever they are...
- **We can extend our hand.** We can **notice**. We can **see**. We can **feel**. We can **hear**. We can **pray**. We can **care**. We can **serve**.
- We can extend ourselves **OR**... We can **avoid**. We can **reject**. We can **withdraw**. We can **look the other way**. It's **up to us**.

I believe His expectation is for those who have been blessed, to take the time to **notice, to embrace, and respond to** those who have little...

- Those who are **weak or marginalized**... those who don't have a voice... those like **widows, foreigners, orphans, and poor**.
- As His people, we're called to bring life and healing to those living in economic and spiritual poverty
- And, we're to do that in the power of the Holy Spirit.

There are people all around you... and nobody is treating them like the son or daughter of a king.

- Jesus is saying, "*Yeah I want to use you. There's so much need. There's so much hurt. I want to use you.*"
- And you would like to say to this Jesus right now, "*All right, Lord. I may not have very much, but what I do have, my time, my strength, my resources, they're all just a gift from You*

anyhow. Take them and use them."

- Heavenly Father, how we thank You for the gift of Jesus!