

COMPASSION

This is the first sermon in a three-part series called “The Heart of God in the Lives of Believers”. This short series is going to take a closer look at some practical gospel-driven concepts at work in our lives. Now, the heart of God on display in the Gospel is something we could study for years, and never finish. So, this short series will not cover the full depth of what God has done in the Gospel, but rather a few key components of the Gospel that are deeply needed in our culture today. God has been doing much in my own heart on this topic for quite a while. I have needed God’s loving and tender work on my heart, and I believe I’m not the only one. Christianity at large is becoming hostile and divided on a variety of topics. This can often come from hearts that are prone to point and judge, rather than love. We are commanded in the New Testament numerous times to love one another, to move, to obey, to serve, and to act according to the Gospel that saves us.

In our culture today, it’s quite easy to collect lots of facts and nuggets about the Bible that smooth our itching ears, and yet fail to live it out. It’s easy to gather lots of knowledge that puffs us up, so we can have our doctrine right, but fail to practically put that into action and do what’s commanded of us. It can be all too easy to miss the whole song of the Gospel that compels us to action.

It’s my aim in this brief series to lay out three magnificent aspects of the heart of God in the gospel. Then, I want to help us consider how we ought to put it into action. Which aspects of the Gospel will we look at? Not judgement, not sovereignty, not holiness, but three humble themes: compassion, mercy, and grace. These three characteristics are so deeply interwoven that it’s difficult to separate them. They will often sing together in unity. Other times they will harmonize together. But, they are important notes that God has embedded in the symphony of the Gospel.

To start off our series, let’s take a look at compassion. Compassion is seen throughout Scripture in many different ways. And there are several passages we could look at to see compassion on display. However, one of the most prominent and memorable displays of compassion is in the book of Luke as Jesus is telling a parable in response to a question. Let’s turn to Luke 10:25–37, and see how Jesus teaches us about compassion.

And behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, “Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the Law? How do you read it?” And he answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have answered correctly; do this, and you will live.” But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he

had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise."

– Luke 10:25–37 (ESV)

This is certainly a challenging parable from Jesus in response to a man trying to earn eternal life. Luke has just opened a new section in his book as Jesus begins his journey to Jerusalem where he will ultimately be arrested, beaten, and killed as a sacrifice for us. And Luke will show us the deep and wonderful compassion of Jesus, as he gives up his life to save those who trust in him. Luke is showing us that is the kind of heart that believers must have. Not hearts that yearn for fulfilling laws and checklists, but rather hearts of compassion. So, he places Jesus' parable directly at the beginning of this new section intended to show us the way that believers ought to be.

THE STANDARD

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Jesus is approached by a man who wants to know the formula to be saved. The text describes this man as a lawyer, or a man of the law. He would have been an expert in Jewish law, much like we have lawyers today who are experts in the laws of our government. Like many other accounts of people coming to Jesus, the focus is on works. Jesus points the man to the Jewish law which the man should know thoroughly. The man summarizes over 600 commands in Jewish law, down to just two simple commands.

First, a person is to love God with their entire being. The man responds with what appears to be a quote from Deuteronomy 30:6. However, throughout the book of Deuteronomy we see this quote appear many times (6:5, 10:12, 11:13, 13:3, 30:2, 30:6), and if you read through Deuteronomy you'll see that parts and pieces of this quote are throughout the book at least nine times. For Jews, the idea of a person loving God with their entire being was a core component of the way they were to live. Loving God was not a nice to have, but rather must-do. You see, God rescued the Jewish people from slavery under the Egyptians. He brought them out of a grueling captivity to freedom. But they were a stubborn people, and failed to trust God over and over again. Yet, God was patient with them. They were often subject to rebuke and punishment, but God's mercy and grace were regularly shown to them. He provided for them, cared for them, preserved their shoes, gave them water in the desert, gave them miracle bread from the sky, and established them an incredibly blessed nation under the reign of King David and King Solomon. So, why would a Jew love God with every fiber of their being? Well, God commanded them to...and because they could look back and see the goodness of God on them. Even in Jesus' day, God had still preserved their

nation despite their repeated abandonment of him. This was the first part of the man's response. To love God completely.

The second part of his response was quoted from Leviticus 19:18, to love the people around them like they love themselves. They were to give up themselves, to pursue the good of someone else, like they would as if they were doing it for their own self. Because of their love for God, they should love the people around them with the same kind of love we naturally want to love ourselves with. Their love for God should be shown by the way they love the people around them. For all the same reasons they love God, they can love their neighbor. Because of how God had cared for them, they should be ready to show that same kind of care to others.

The lawyer's statement is a simple command. I mean it's a few short, specific words. But, the more a Jewish person would meditate on this, questions begin to rise up. The simplicity you see on the first reading becomes and unbearable, impossible task. How could anyone continually uphold an unfailing all-consuming love for God, displayed by an unfailing, all-consuming love for others? How could any person in this world continually keep that kind of standard?

Well, that's the glory of the Gospel, but before we get to that, let's continue in our passage.

THE HEART

But he, desiring to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." And Jesus said to him, "You go, and do likewise." – Luke 10:29–37 (ESV)

The lawyer knew the trouble with simple command from verses 25-28. They were impossible consistently obey! So, he was looking for a way to limit his responsibility. To make the law more achievable. The man wanted to be considered just, or to be considered righteous. He asks Jesus to provide a definition of the legal term 'neighbor'. Jesus responds not with a definition, but a story.

The story opens with a man traveling between cities. Along the way, robbers attack, strip him, beat him, and leave him for dead. They have taken everything the man has, and even attempted to take his life. Yet, he remains barely alive on the road. This is the setting of our story. A person who is in great need, unable to help themselves, with deep wounds, headed towards death. This man needs someone to come and save him and provide healing.

Then, a priest and a Levite come walking down the road. No, this isn't the start of a joke. In fact, it's quite the opposite. Jesus is providing a direct challenge to the law-based living that the lawyer inquired about. Both of these individuals would have been law-focused in their lives. These two individuals were the elite among the Jews. Jews looked up to these kinds of people. As they are on their way, they see this man in great need laying by the road and decide not to help. They pass by on the other side of the road. Notice that both of them clearly see the man, but choose not to get involved. Perhaps they are fearful of breaking the law. Perhaps they are wish not to associate with someone of this caliber. Perhaps they simply being selfish. Either way, Jesus through Luke is trying to make the point that these two lawful people see the man, and make a conscious choice to carry on their way.

Then, a *Samaritan* comes along. Samaritans and Jews were not on friendly terms. In fact, they were more like enemies than friends. Just like the priest and the Levite, the Samaritan sees the man. But, unlike the the other two, the Samaritan is moved with compassion. When the Samaritan saw the condition of the man, and the plight he was in...he was moved. Notice compassion at work here. He didn't just see the man, and feel sadness, grief, or pity. He moved in began caring for his wounds to aid the healing process. The Samaritan traded places with the half-dead man and put him on his animal giving, up his own seat of comfort, to carry the man in need. But that's not all. The Samaritan brought him to an inn and stayed by him to care for him while he recovered through the night. And, the next day he took his own money and pre-paid for the innkeeper to tend to him with a promise to pay whatever was needed.

This is a heart of compassion. Compassion isn't simply a feeling we have. Compassion the fusion of an inward feeling with outward action. Compassion isn't compassion unless we're also doing something about that feeling we feel. Compassion is a very human thing, because compassion is a Godly thing. Many times throughout the scriptures God is referred to as compassionate towards humanity, despite our wretched rebellion against him.

After telling this story, Jesus asks the man a simple question: which character in the story was a neighbor to the man in need? The lawyer clearly got the point, and answered that it was the one who showed mercy. Luke ends this encounter with Jesus clear, but simple words, "Go and do likewise." Compassion is something Jesus expects of kingdom citizens.

After hearing this story we begin to get an idea for what compassion truly is. The word "compassion" in Scripture, especially coming from it's original Greek meaning comes from a variety of words in the original Greek and Hebrew languages. Typically, they are translated from those languages into English by the closest word we would know. But, if you were to try and group them all together to broaden our understanding you would hear themes like this: "to be affected deeply in one's inner being..."¹ One Bible dictionary put it this way: "That (human) disposition that fuels acts of kindness and mercy. Compassion, a form of love, is aroused within us when we are confronted with those who suffer or are vulnerable. Compassion often produces action..."² Lastly, "Such compassion stands ready to help the one who is sorrowing."³ You can see that our typical English understanding of 'compassion' is often only half-way

¹ Bible Sense Lexicon, Logos

² Eerdmans Bible Dictionary on "Compassion"

³ Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary on "Compassion" under "*Oiktirmos*"

correct. Compassion isn't merely an inward feeling, but also accompanied by an outward expression, an outward action.

COMPASSION IN THE GOSPEL

If we reflect on this passage, you could ask what would drive anyone to love God, and love others in this kind of compassionate way? Why would anyone sacrifice so much of themselves and their own comforts to help someone else?

There is a simple answer: The gospel. Why? Because the Gospel is rich with compassion towards us. What is the Gospel? The gospel is a true story full of good news about the relationship between God and humanity.

It all starts back in Genesis 1 which tells us that God created everything, including the first two humans. It was perfect. There was no sin in everything God created. Then, those first two humans chose to disobey God and do things their own way. They rejected the incredible blessing and kingship of God. Since then, everything in the world is under the curse of sin, including every human. We are broken and can no longer live our lives to please God. We are what the Bible calls, "unrighteous". This means that every human is headed for the judgement and punishment of God in hell, forever. And we can put on our self-righteousness and say: "That's not fair! I wasn't the one who chose to reject God back in the beginning. Why am I going to be punished for something I didn't do?" Well, we all reject God in various ways. Since God created all things, he is King over it all including us. And we have not lived our lives according to his standard. So, yes we have rejected God and we rightly deserve the eternal, unimaginable punishment that's coming. But the story doesn't end there with this terrible hopeless plight.

Our situation was awful. It's truly beyond our comprehension how bad it actually was. Wait, what do you mean "was"? Well, this is where we see the glory of God in the gospel! God the father sent Jesus his son, who is fully God to become a human here on earth. He lived the perfect life we could never have lived and died to pay the penalty for our rebellion and sinfulness. He was the sacrifice that was needed to pay for our sins. He died in our place. Then, he rose from the dead, coming back to life so we can have new life in him. This is the "good news", or the "gospel"! Because, if we believe in him, in who he is, in what he has done, and that it is for us...we can be saved from the eternal punishment and wrath of God. (John 6:35) This is the way, the only way to be saved. (John 14:10)

Jesus has done the most magnificent work to do what we could not. God saw that humanity was beaten, laying on the side of the road, and in need of healing. In God's great compassion, he gave up his own son and sent him to earth. God the son, Jesus, left his heavenly place to take on humanity, live perfectly, experience an unimaginable burden of sin, and suffer a horrible death for that sin. Jesus doesn't just display glimpses of compassion while he was walking this earth, his entire mission and life here on earth is one of compassion. That compassion is towards us! We should rejoice in this, marvel in it, and be overwhelmed by the greatness of this compassion that we have experienced. This is the kind of compassion that would lead us to give up ourselves for others. This is the kind of compassion that should cause us to see others in new ways, with a heart that yearns to be compassionate.

Is this true of you? Do you take time to marvel in the awe of the gospel? Are you grateful for what God has done? Do you take time to think about the punishment, the unimaginable suffering, the eternal torment, the great wrath of God that Jesus has spared you from? Or perhaps you haven't yet believed the gospel, this good news about what Jesus has done. Jesus invites you to come, join yourself to him as your savior and king, and walk in the newness of life to glorify him. (Matthew 11:30) This is the kind of compassion that draws us in and changes our lives.

LIVING IT OUT

Now, we could stop there and be done. We could walk out those doors and bask in the great saving work of Jesus. We can behold and appreciate the depth of God's great compassion on us to enjoy a great emotional high. But, we must not only know what God has done. We must put it to work in our lives. We must be shaped by it in our desires, our thoughts, and our actions. If we merely hear these words, we risk acting like hypocrites...like the unforgiving servant from Matthew 18:23-35, who had been forgiven an unpayable debt, yet refused to forgive a fellow servant a measly amount.

Compassion is an inward feeling, a resonance with the person before us, that leads us to action. It leads us to grant mercy and grace upon those around us. It's a critical aspect of our experience as recipients of the grace and mercy of God. A deeply internalized appreciation of the Gospel will lead us to be people of compassion that becomes the inspiration to be merciful and gracious. And these are the focus of the next two sermons for that very reason. But, before to jump there, let's consider compassion in our lives.

So, the first point for us to reflect on: Are you compassionate? Take time this week to consider whether you truly display compassion towards others. Evaluate whether you see others and are moved to action. This is an area for discipleship. To ask an older brother or sister in the faith to help you see yourself clearly. To challenge your life by engaging in the word together. When you meet with your discipler, devote some time to considering how to grow in compassion together.

Second, do you slow down to see the plight of others? Are you so wrapped up in your own desires that you fail to see the people God has put around you? Are there areas of life where you may excel at this, but need growth in others? Perhaps at school you are willing to be compassionate, but the closeness with family at home grows more frustration than compassion. Or perhaps your life at work has become more about achieving the next promotion or position, and you've lost the care and concern for your coworkers. Or maybe at home you love your family and children but fail to see and pursue your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ here at church.

Third, do you feel for those around you? The Greek definition of the word is rooted in a deep, inward response that even moves someone in their inward parts. Do we take time to slow down and consider what others might be going through? As disciplers, do we get to know those we disciple so we can understand their struggles, their situations and move with genuine care and concern to help them? Do we see those around us in ways where we stop to understand and consider how they might be doing with the difficulties and situations of life. And, this doesn't just happen at the large church gatherings, but also in our flock groups. Flocks are our primary way for us to get to know each other, to serve one another, to

encourage one another, to join together closely around Christ. Are you attending flock to be others-focused? Are you there to seek opportunities to be compassionate to those around? Do you consider the single person who may be lonely? Do you see the parents with children who may feel overwhelmed? Do you consider the elderly you may have physical difficulties? Or others who may have great burdens that weigh them down. Are you actively developing the kind of compassionate heart that is deeply moved by the brothers and sisters among you?

Fourthly, are we moved not just inwardly, but also moved to action? Biblically speaking, compassion isn't simply a feeling. Compassion is accompanied by an appropriate response to that feeling. That means putting our minds, hands, and feet to into action on behalf of others. It's not always appropriate to relieve the suffering of others, but are we eager to provide appropriate help? Where can we start? How about prayer? Prayer is powerful. The New Testament is full of examples and commands to pray regularly for others. Do we take time to pause and go before our powerful and compassionate God on behalf of others? Do we pray with faith?

How about discipleship? Are we actively giving our time and efforts in discipleship relationships? Are we making ourselves available in Titus 2 kinds of ways to train the younger in the practical, Christ-centered ways of living? Are we willing to share the 'unspiritual' day-to-day life skills that God has blessed you with?

In our relationships, are we willing and eager to forgive those who have sinned against us? Do we strive together to serve those in the church around us? Are we involved in the support of the many ministries that we have at Clearcreek?

And for unbelievers...are we burdened for their destiny? Are we moved to share the good news of Jesus with them? Do we strategize ways of working into their lives? Do we move with intention to meet, serve, and engage in their lives? Do we find creative ways to display the testimony of Jesus with your hands and feet? Do you look outwardly to the lost with hearts that grieve for their hell-bound direction, and move as Kingdom citizens to bring them the good news?

As believers, compassion is a deep and meaningful topic. Our lives should be inspired by Gospel compassion. Our lives should reflect Gospel compassion.

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. — Colossians 3:12-13

In the words of Jesus to the lawyer, "You go, and do likewise".