

## THE ACTION OF COMPASSION

Matthew 9:35-38, ***“Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. 37 Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest.”***

During the Christmas season, a woman in England posted a Facebook message reading, "Took all my pills; I'll be dead soon so bye-bye every one." A total of 148 comments were made, many of them mocking her. At the time she had more than 1,000 Facebook friends, but none showed any compassion. No one called or went by to check on her. The next day the police found her dead body. The suicidal posting was taken down from her Facebook wall and replaced by many loving remembrances ... A bit too late don't you think?

What is the principal evidence that compassion has been extended? What does compassion leave in its wake? The most significant consequence of compassion is, it alleviates suffering. It lifts people's burdens and makes life more bearable. And that's what the Lord Jesus was all about! Christ has often been called, "The Man of Compassion." And that's because He entered the arena of human suffering and lifted their burdens. That's what mercy is. Mercy is more than an emotional experience of feeling someone's pain it's doing what's possible to alleviate it. Compassion is action! And the action of compassion always confirms the genuine feeling of love that one has for another. We are called to disciple nations but it starts with loving your neighbour!

Jesus was moved with compassion because He loved the people who had genuine needs. Jesus couldn't look at people without being stirred to intervene. He was specifically moved when people were experiencing pain, sickness, distress and sorrow. He was moved when people were hungry or lonely or confused.

Matthew 9:36 says, *"When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them."* Why did Jesus have compassion on them and why are we to have compassion on others? Because, *"They were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd."* Christ intervened for people because they couldn't fend for themselves - they were helpless! This is an incredibly intense phrase, **"He was moved with compassion."** It reveals the heart of God the Father. Jesus' assignment was to seek and save that which was lost (Luke 19:10); and what drove Him and motivated Him to accomplish this aim was 'compassion'. The word translated compassion is the strongest expression for pity the Greek language offers. It describes being moved to the depths of one's being. That's what made Jesus so immensely popular. People converged on Him everywhere He went:

- The hopeless thronged around Him because He restored their faith.
- Sinners swarmed Him because He forgave them and removed their guilt.
- Outcasts approached Him because they knew He wouldn't reject them.
- The sick and diseased crowded Him because His healing came free and unconditionally.

This is what Christ was all about—helping people. And that's why He said in John 6:37, ***"Whoever comes to Me I will never drive away."***

How do you think Jesus earned that reputation, "Friend of sinners"? He earned it by accepting people—even those that were ostracised from the mainstream of society. The Kingdom of God is about reaching people. It's about touching people. It's about transforming people (and then nations). And the way we reach, touch, and transform others is through **compassion**.

There's an amazing correlation between the Church's ability to reap a harvest and a Christian's compassion. Look again at our opening passage - Matthew 9:35-38. Here Jesus purposely linked these statements of reaping the harvest with a labourer's compassion. That's why Psalm 126:5-6 says: ***"Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy. He who goes out weeping, carrying seed to sow, will return with songs of joy, carrying sheaves with him"*** (NIV). We need compassion to reap the harvest! Souls are being lost simply because Christians are not being moved by compassion!

There's another example in Scripture. It happened when Jesus visited the region of Gadara and encountered a demoniac. His name was Legion, which meant 2000. He was possessed with 2000 demons that Jesus dismissed with a mere word (Mark 5:18-20). That's when the man begged to follow Jesus and His apostles. But Jesus said to him: *"No, I have another mission for you. Take this compassion I've given you and share it."* And that's what he did. He departed and proclaimed what great things Christ had done for him. And the Bible says: "all the people were amazed" at his testimony!

The message God gave to this man also applies to us. As recipients of Christ's compassion we should share that compassion. The Gospel we received is the Gospel we must convey! You may say, "To whom does God expect me to share compassion? Let's examine that quickly..."

Luke 10 records the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus tells of a traveler that was attacked and left for dead. When a priest and a Levite walked by they saw the man but wouldn't get involved. They didn't just turn their heads. Luke says they crossed the road and "passed by on the other side." They completely shunned this man. But when a Samaritan, a detested half-breed, walked near, he **"had compassion on him."** He didn't just feel for the man - he intervened. His compassion brought action! He bandaged the wounds, gave him a ride to the nearest village, provided him with medicine and a recovery room, and paid the cost. What an example to us! If we are really concerned for others it will manifest in the form of action! The action of compassion!

There are two major points in this parable. One underlines the great need for compassion. The other identifies those to whom we should extend compassion. That's what Jesus meant when He said: "Which of these three do you think was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" Notice that word neighbour. The Greek to English translation here doesn't carry its full impact. When this word is interpreted correctly it doesn't just mean those living in your suburb. The word means, "those close by; whoever is near you, wherever you may be!"

Jesus was saying our compassion should be directed toward anyone within close proximity to us. That means if you're at a football match, a music symphony, or an amusement park your neighbour is whoever you're near at the time. And if someone is in need, you have the power to assist. Why not consider that divine providence has placed you there to intervene - to do something! Compassion can be shown in the simplest of ways! God wants us to live with a sensitivity that discerns burdened and confused people and then to help them. That's what compassion does. Compassion is action! It gets involved and takes a risk! It is prepared to lose its reputation! This is what Jesus did throughout His ministry.

- Jesus said about the centurion's servant: *"I will come and heal him"* (Matthew 8:7).
- He said to the paralytic: *"Take heart ... your sins are forgiven"* (Matthew 9:2).
- He said about the tax collectors: *"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick"* (Matthew 2:17).
- He said to the woman with the issue of blood: *"Go in peace and be freed from your suffering"* (Matthew 5:34).
- He said to the synagogue ruler whose daughter was at death's door: *"I will come and heal her"* (Matthew 5:26).
- And at His dying hour Jesus turned to the thief on the cross and said: *"Today you will be with me in paradise."*

You see, compassion is action! It doesn't talk about it, it gets involved! That's the essence of Christ's mission. He left the perfect surroundings of heaven and entered this world of imperfection to make it a better place. That should be our mission also!

"It's funny how, in this journey of life, even though we may begin at different times and places, our paths cross with others so that we may share our love and compassion. This is a design of God that I appreciate and cherish." - Steve Maraboli.