

Compassion Sermon 01

I am starting a new mini-series this morning, on a topic that I think we spoke about in a recent Thursday night Bible Study. Indeed I think Sean may have even suggested that I would like to teach in this topic sometime soon. Well, here I go.

This is a topic that I remember myself and Nunsy starting to discuss on one of our many walks; we spoke about this along with love for one another and how we could generate more of both within our own fellowship.

I did touch on this word very briefly last week during the sermon, we I mentioned that we are all on numerous paths and roads in our Christian walk. I don't believe that we are on one road, one path; the way I see it is that we are on many ways at same time. We see great success in some areas of our lives, little success in others. On some paths we seem to be blessed, with the waves of blessing crashing over us; on other paths we seem to struggle wondering where the blessings are.

I mentioned this last week, that in business and prosperity I feel to be on the 'blessings' path, however in other areas I may have taken a wrong turning or two. One area that I think I require a change of direction is in compassion. And it is this area that I have been meditating upon all week and want to start teaching on for a season.

I also want to experiment with this mini-series and want to try something new. I've done similar things in past but not quite like way I'm planning for this new series. I have been tidying up my hard drives and computer filing system and found a teaching series of Rob Bell from 10-12 years ago. Now I know lot people don't appreciate Rob Bell, thinking he is a heretic and all that, but I remember this series being great at time and I started watching them again last weekend.

The teaching series is about the art of giving a sermon, about reclaiming the sermon and I am thoroughly enjoying it and one thing he said hit home to me. You may remember in the distant past that I used to take questions and let people comment after sermon. But we were finding lot times that these comments and questions were taking away from the message I wanted give, so as a leadership team at the time we decided to stop that.

I've always felt though that the sermon should not be final word, it should rather be the start of something. And this is what Rob Bell was discussing in his first sermon about sermons. A sermon should not be the last word, it should be the first word, it should be a conversation starter. So, I want us to start discussing the sermon during the week, and go on a journey of discovery together. I really want to encourage you to study compassion for yourself and then comment. That's why I'll be producing summary notes and meditation points each week, and then publishing them. I think I'll be putting them on the MGF FB page and on our ministry FB page. We may also start a WhatsApp group if people are into using that platform. I am looking for questions, comments, discussion about this series, about compassion. I'm not sure exactly how this will go, but let's see how it develops.

So, what is compassion?

This is a word we all know, a word we all think we know the meaning of, but I wonder if there is a deeper and more profound revelation waiting for us. This week is simply be an introduction to this topic, in what is really going to be a word study. This will be a word study that will take us right through the Bible, from the Old Testament, through the Gospels and into the New Testament. What I have seen this week in my preliminary studies, in my meditations, is that the concept of compassion can be found throughout Scripture.

We will see that compassion is a character of God the Father.

We will see that compassion is a character of Jesus Christ.

We will see that as a born-again New Covenant believer we are commended to be compassionate people, we are called and enabled to be compassionate. Now, none that should come as a surprise to any of us.

God the Father was and is compassionate.

Exodus 34:5 And the LORD descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD.

Exodus 34:6 And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth

Here we see Moses in an encounter with The Living God, where The Almighty describes Himself to Moses. And the first descriptor He uses for Himself is that he is compassionate. But Vic the first descriptor in that verse is merciful and not compassionate. Yes, that's the translation in my Bible (the King James version), but others are indeed translated as compassionate, and the actual Hebrew word means compassionate.

The Hebrew word is rakh-oom, to be full of compassion and merciful, and comes from a root word that means (by implication) to love. Isn't it wonderful that first character descriptor God uses for Himself with Moses is compassionate? It is all about His love for mankind and that of course is good news for mankind.

We also see a picture of God's compassion in the account of the prodigal son, or what I prefer to call the account of the Prodigal's Father.

Luke 15:20 And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.

We know this is a picture of the love that God the Father has towards us. When the father in this account saw his son, he had compassion, and this is a picture of God's compassion to us His children. He is a God of compassion, and we will see that in lessons to come.

Hebrews 1:3 Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high

Jesus is the express image of the Father so compassion is part of His character too, He is and always will be compassionate, He is after all the same today, yesterday and forever.

And what about us, where do we as believers come into this?

Colossians 3:12 Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering;

Colossians 3:13 Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

Colossians 3:14 And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.

The word bowel in bowels mercy is the root word where compassion comes from (much more on that in another sermon). We are created in the image of God, on His likeness, so compassion should be in our character too. I would go so far as to say that ss born again believers, filled with the Holy Spirit we should have a greater capacity for compassion than other men.

Now I don't actually believe that as Christians we have a monopoly on compassion. I know and have known many compassionate unbelievers and unfortunately the opposite is also sadly true, as I have known and know many believers sadly lacking in compassion. I do believe though that as believers we can and should have a greater propensity to be compassionate compared to those that do not proclaim Christ as their Lord and Saviour.

Does anyone remember Roy Hattersley? He was a very clever and able, yet under rated politician. He was deputy leader of the Labour Party for a while, and was a staunch atheist and was quite outspoken against religion and against the church. Yet I remember him talking about the compassion he saw in Christians, that they started most of the charities, most good works in Britain. He said that they gave atheists and humanists a bad name as they were not as charitable as Christians. Even this atheist recognised the compassion in believers, the propensity to meet the needs of others.

I will touch more on this later, but having the Living God inside us, should lead us to a greater capacity for compassion, and a greater understanding of the love of God will lead to compassion, and a greater understanding of our own forgiveness will push us toward compassion. But that is another sermon for another day.

OK, so what does compassion mean?

What does it mean to be compassionate, have compassion for someone?

I have been pondering this for the most of this week, trying to get a good, simple definition, and it has not been easy.

There are many definitions out there, in dictionaries and online, but I wanted to come up with meaning that would be for us. Seem the aim of this teaching, these lessons, is for me and then you to learn more about compassion. Then I hope I will become more compassionate, and you will become more compassionate people, firstly with each other within the church fellowship, and then to the outside world.

Firstly I see compassion as inter-personal.

You cannot be compassionate, or 'do compassion on your own'. You cannot think, "Today I am going to be compassionate", and then wander around rest day on your own; that is not how it works. You feel compassion, have compassion towards another human being.

With God the Father, He has compassion to mankind.

When Jesus walked on this earth He was moved with compassion for people.

One entity or being or body has compassion towards another; there is always at least 2 parties involved where compassion is to be found.

Secondly, it requires a need for compassion to be roused up in us. I'll spend a few sermons I think looking at the example of Jesus, seeing ho He was moved with compassion. Think for a moment about when we are told that Jesus was moved with compassion.

It was when multitudes were fainting and scattered abroad, when they were sick, when they were hungry. When people were in lack or need, we see Jesus being moved with compassion.

It seems to me that before one can have compassion you need to care for someone, or love them; the more I meditate on this the more I see compassion as a form of love. And I think that if we are without love we will be without compassion. I aim to explore this thought in more depth.

Thirdly it should bring a call to action to fulfil those needs. In the examples we just spoke of with Jesus He was moved with compassion and then He healed them, fed them and led them. What did He do? He was moved to action due to a need people had and He fulfilled that need; there was a practical aspect to His compassion. He was moved with compassion and healed the leper and opened blind eyes. Compassion for another person came because of their need and He was compassionate and met their need.

What about a definition then?

Compassion is a form of care or love, that is aroused within in a person when they see others suffering, in peril, in need, or in lack. This compassion then leads the person to action to fulfil the need of the person they love and care for.

Compassion therefore is about care and love, about seeing a need, and meeting that need. It is so much more than just a feeling of pity or sympathy or empathy. There is an action associated with it. Without practical help, without fulfilling that need it is simply pity or sympathy or empathy and not compassion. We cannot say oh I feel such compassion for those people and then walk on by. There needs to be an appropriate action, and we will explore that as well going forward.

Here is the thing though, there are numerous people around us in this world, lots of people in need, with many opportunities for us to be compassionate, to have compassion roused within us. The question is do we care enough, do we love enough, to be compassionate? DO we care and love enough to be roused up by a need and to act? I know that's a question for me, and I'm working through that myself. Hopefully, this is a question you'll maybe ponder as well over the coming weeks.

Mark 1:40 And there came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean.

Mark 1:41 And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean.

Mark 1:42 And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed.

Here we have what I think is the perfect example of my definition of compassion. And this is a perfect example for us, as I see Jesus here as a man, as a human being, confronted with another human being in need. That is where compassion starts, I believe, when someone is confronted with a fellow human being in want or lack or peril or danger or need.

We see Jesus confronted with another human being in need, in this case, a man with leprosy. A man desperate to be healed, pleading with Jesus, kneeling in front of Him in absolute despair. And Jesus was moved with compassion.

This is the amazing Greek word, SPLANGKH-NID-ZOM-AHEE. It means to have the bowels yearn, that is to feel sympathy, to pity. It is like a feeling that comes from deep within you, with a depth of feeling that is intense and not superficial. It gives the sense of great emotion, a stirring emotion, and strong, powerful feelings. That is the Greek meaning of the word.

But it does not end there, it is not just a feeling. As I have already said, there needs to be a corresponding action, a practical result. As we go through the Gospels together, we will see that every time Jesus was moved with compassion He did something, He was also moved to act and meet a need.

There was compassion and He was then compassionate; we see a feeling and then an action.

In this account Jesus puts forth His hand, touching the man. This is a very special moment as this was a hugely significant act in that culture for a Jewish man to touch a leper. Jesus literally reached out to the man, He put forth His hand. If we see a need and feel sorrow or pity and do not 'put forth a hand', that is not compassion, as I said it is just pity or sympathy or empathy. There must be a reaching to, a connection, can you see that?

And of course in this encounter Jesus heals the man. He met the required need. There is a need, He cared for and loved the man, and He met that need. That for me is the perfect picture of compassion, a picture for us as believers to aim for and imitate.

So that is a short introduction to this new series all about compassion. And I want us to go on a journey together learning about this word, this concept, this truth.

Compassion is a character of God and a character Jesus and should be one of the characters that define us as Christians. I want us to learn about compassion, but with a purpose. This is not just an intellectual exercise, but for us to become more compassionate. I agree that we are all at different levels in how compassionate we are, where we are on the 'compassion scale'.

I do not think any one of us who would not benefit from being more compassionate. And one thing is for sure, those around us and in the world will benefit if do become more compassionate.

AMEN