

Compassion 02

We started a new teaching series last week about compassion, wanting us to go on a journey together learning about compassion and as a result become more compassionate ourselves. We saw that God is compassionate, that Jesus is compassionate and that we are called to compassion. My aim is to work through these statements in the coming weeks.

We also came up with a definition for compassion last week:

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.

This definition may change, be updated, as we work through the Bible. Please remember that I am looking for you to study this out for yourself and feedback your own revelations.

Let us start this week by looking at God's compassion, firstly by reading this passage of Scripture.

1 Kings 3 v 16 to 28

Then came there two women, that were harlots, unto the king, and stood before him.

And the one woman said, O my lord, I and this woman dwell in one house; and I was delivered of a child with her in the house.

And it came to pass the third day after that I was delivered, that this woman was delivered also: and we were together; there was no stranger with us in the house, save we two in the house.

And this woman's child died in the night; because she overlaid it.

And she arose at midnight, and took my son from beside me, while thine handmaid slept, and laid it in her bosom, and laid her dead child in my bosom.

And when I rose in the morning to give my child suck, behold, it was dead: but when I had considered it in the morning, behold, it was not my son, which I did bear.

And the other woman said, Nay; but the living is my son, and the dead is thy son. And this said, No; but the dead is thy son, and the living is my son. Thus they spake before the king.

Then said the king, The one saith, This is my son that liveth, and thy son is the dead: and the other saith, Nay; but thy son is the dead, and my son is the living.

And the king said, Bring me a sword. And they brought a sword before the king.

And the king said, Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one, and half to the other.

Then spake the woman whose the living child was unto the king, for her bowels yearned upon her son, and she said, O my lord, give her the living child, and in no wise slay it. But the other said, Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it.

Then the king answered and said, Give her the living child, and in no wise slay it: she is the mother thereof.

And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had judged; and they feared the king: for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgment.

Wow, that is quite a story. We see two women that have babies, and one baby dies, so both women claim the child that is alive. And Solomon must sort this mess out, he has to make a decision to deal with the issue. But Solomon is a man of immense wisdom (I reckon he was very wise, and quite devious when we hear his decision). He says we can sort this by giving each mother half of the child. Simply cut the baby in half and give each mother a piece!

One mother (the fake one) said, "That's fine by me, I'm ok with neither of us having him, yes, cut him in half". The other (the true mother) of course wanted the child to live so said, "No, don't do that, give her the child. Let the child live, but give it to her".

But why did she do this, knowing that she would lose her child for ever to the other woman? She did this because she was moved with compassion towards her child.

1Kings 3:26 Then spake the woman whose the living child was unto the king, for her bowels yearned upon her son, and she said, O my lord, give her the living child, and in no wise slay it. But the other said, Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it.

Her bowels yearned upon her son is what the Word says. Her love and care for her child moved her to action, move her to save the life of the child even if she lost him for ever.

The Hebrew word for bowels here is RAKH-AM, and it means compassion, interestingly by extension the womb, as cherishing the foetus. Now there is a meaning loaded with significance and implications, and I think this helps us understand this concept of compassion. Yes, it talks of that feeling coming from deep within, within our core, and for a woman that centre of life is her womb. So this is talking about strong feelings and emotions from deep within. But it implies something else; it is talking about that deep bond and love between mother and child, beginning with mother and foetus, before the child is even born.

But what has this got to do with God the Father you may say? The Hebrew word RAKH-AM is like the word RAKH-OOM, in that it comes from same primitive root meaning. And that was the word we looked at briefly last week when Almighty God described Himself as being compassionate. If you remember it was the first character that God used to describe Himself to Moses.

Exodus 34 v 1 to 6

And the LORD said unto Moses, Hew thee two tables of stone like unto the first: and I will write upon these tables the words that were in the first tables, which thou brakest.

And be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning unto mount Sinai, and present thyself there to me in the top of the mount.

And no man shall come up with thee, neither let any man be seen throughout all the mount; neither let the flocks nor herds feed before that mount.

And he hewed two tables of stone like unto the first; and Moses rose up early in the morning, and went up unto mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and took in his hand the two tables of stone.

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

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

As I said, the first word God the Father uses to describe Himself to Moses was merciful, that is the translation in my Bible. You may have something different, you may have compassionate, and that is what the Hebrew word here means. It means to be full of compassion and to be merciful, and is the Hebrew word RAKH-OOM.

I mentioned last week that if I was God, I think I may have described myself in a different way. I would probably have said something like this, "Lord, the Lord God, God Almighty, King of Kings, all powerful Creator of the universe" and so on, describing my power and might and majesty. And I don't think many of us would have been surprised if this was what God had said.

But no, He says He is compassionate, He proclaimed His compassion, and that speaks to me in a very powerful way. This truth has impacted me this week. Indeed it should speak to all of us, especially with the definition that we have. God is saying, "I love and care for you, I am moved by your needs and I will act to fulfil your needs".

And of course we are the people He loves and wants to move to help.

Let's get back to the Hebrew for a moment. Both those words that we have seen, RAKH-AM (1 Kings 3 v 26) and RAKH-OOM (Exodus 34 v 6) come from the same root word, the same primitive root. This is the Hebrew word RAW-KHAM. They may all look and sound similar (especially the way I say them), but please believe me, they are different words.

RAW-KHAM a primitive root, and it means to fondle, by implication to love, especially to be compassionate. And here I think we are getting to the root meaning of compassion; it means to love.

Here we are getting to the crux of the matter, to the most important thing that we can know about compassion. God was moved to compassion through His love, His love for mankind, and the same is true for us. The bottom line is that if we don't love people, we will not be compassionate towards them, and I hope to explore this concept more fully later in this series.

The comments and feedback I have had since last week's message tend to make me think that we do agree on this, and that is quite challenging, especially for those of us honest enough to say that we think we lack compassion sometimes.

My studies have shown me that these words are used in Old Testament time and time again; RAW-KHAM 47 times, RAKH-AM 44 times and RAKH-OOM 13. This is too many for us to go through today, but many instances are in the Psalms and that is where we will turn to next.

Psalm 103 v 1 to 13

A Psalm of David. Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits:

Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases;

Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with lovingkindness and tender mercies;

Who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.

The LORD executeth righteousness and judgment for all that are oppressed.

He made known his ways unto Moses, his acts unto the children of Israel.

The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.

He will not always chide: neither will he keep his anger for ever.

He hath not dealt with us after our sins; nor rewarded us according to our iniquities.

For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him.

As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us.

Like as a father pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them that fear him.

As you probably know, this is one of my favourite Psalms. It is a Psalm that is all about the promises we have under the New Covenant, under grace, and is written to us, the church. The start of the Psalm is interesting in the context of our topic as we see all three Hebrew words mentioned thus far.

In verse 4 the word mercies is RAKH-AM, compassion as in cherishing the foetus. We are promised that God has a love and compassion towards us as that of a mother to her child. This reminds me of

Ephesians 1 v 5 where we as believers have been adopted into His family as a child of His. We are His children, and He loves us and cares for us as a mother cares for her own child.

In verse 8 the word merciful is RAKH-OOM, full of compassion. Remember compassion is about seeing a need and meeting a need, so what need are we in here? Reading the next few verses will answer this question. We were in need because of the sin issue, we as mankind were in a hopeless state and could not help ourselves. So in His love and care, He was compassionate, and met our need through Jesus Christ, our Saviour. And now under grace, under the New Covenant, as far as east is from west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us. This is good news.

Mankind was in such need, He had love and care, as a mother for a child, he had that strong feeling deep from inside and He met our need through the finished work of Jesus. This is a picture of compassion, based on love, His agape love.

Finally in verse 13 the word pitieth is RAW-KHAM, and means to fondle, by implication to love, especially to be compassionate. And I especially love this verse as those of us that are fathers get in on the 'action' now.

This is saying in the same way a father has compassion in his children, so God the Father has compassion on us, on those who hold Him in awe and respect and reverence. Now this speaks to me in a big way, but I know it can be an issue for some with people a different experience, but I can only speak from what I went through.

Although my Dad was not perfect, I know that he loved me deeply, and I love my kids and granddaughter, so this verse resonates with me. I know what my Dad did for me and my brothers, how hard he worked to provide to meet our needs, and I know what I have done and would do for kids and for Lydia. So I know that strength of feeling, that depth of feeling; and I know that is what God has for me. Well I don't actually as His love for me is so much more than I could ever have.

And I can also relate from that personal experience to the depth of love, care and compassion that He has for you too.

Every need, want, lack you may have, every area of peril and danger, He wants to meet that need. Indeed He has met that need already through the finished work of Jesus Christ, through His love for you and through His compassion. You already have all spiritual blessings in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1 v3), and you already have all you need for life and godliness (2 Peter 1 v 3).

There are so many other verses we could look at in the Psalms and the rest of the Old Testament; if you added those up earlier, they come to 106.

Isaiah 49 v 8 to 15

***Thus saith the LORD, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee: and I will preserve thee, and give thee for a covenant of the people, to establish the earth, to cause to inherit the desolate heritages;
That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places.
They shall not hunger nor thirst; neither shall the heat nor sun smite them: for he that hath mercy on them shall lead them, even by the springs of water shall he guide them.
And I will make all my mountains a way, and my highways shall be exalted.
Behold, these shall come from far: and, lo, these from the north and from the west; and these from the land of Sinim.***

***Sing, O heavens; and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the LORD hath comforted his people, and will have mercy upon his afflicted.
But Zion said, The LORD hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.
Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee.***

This passage is written in the context of the Jewish nation on the eve of returning from Babylon, so is a time of possible fear and anxiety. And the Lord is speaking to them, saying you may have forgotten me, but I have not forgotten you. In verse 13 He is saying He has compassion (RAW-KHAM) on them.

He describes His compassion as that of a mother suckling her child. Now I know a human mother's love is not perfect, and we see and hear some terrible things that mothers can do. But the way we describe deep, deep, unconditional love is that love a mother has for her child. Would you agree?

This is a good picture of deep, unconditional, and never-ending love. The verse is asking can a mother forget the son from her womb. The answer is of course not. She can never stop being compassionate is what the writer is saying.

So therefore God is telling the people that He cannot stop being compassionate to them. No matter what they do, you may even forget Him, He will still be compassionate to them. His love, care and compassion are never ending, and it is not conditional.

And that is a picture of God's compassion for mankind. No matter how depraved we got, no matter how far away we went, no matter how many times we forgot about God. His plan was always Jesus, with the possibility for every man to have the sin issue fixed. All men are born with a need, a want, a lack; that is clear throughout the whole of Scripture. But the finished work of Jesus meets that need. Why does it meet that need? Because God never stopped being compassionate, because He never stops being compassionate. That is what He is; that is the first descriptor He used with Moses remember.

Do you remember the meaning of RAW-KHAM? It is to fondle, by implication to love, especially to be compassionate. Let's finish by looking at some New Covenant Scripture that talk about love.

1 John 4 v 7 to 11

Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.

In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

Here is a great description of the compassion of God. He is love; it is not just that He is capable of love, but He is love. That is His overriding characteristic, love. That is why compassion is the first descriptor He uses with Moses. Compassion is His outward expression of His deep love for us.

I was reading this passage again yesterday before communion and verse 9 'jumped out' at me. It says, "in this was manifested the love of God towards us", and I realised that this is what compassion is, His compassion is the manifestation of His love. He loved us, He saw our need, and He sent His Son to be the payment for our sins.

He saw our need and He was moved with love because He is love. He saw our need and met our need; He was moved to action and in this we see a practical manifestation of His love.

He sent Jesus to deal with the sin issue, and make the way for our salvation and our righteousness; He made the way for us to come into His family as His children, through reconciliation and forgiveness.

That is compassion.

God is compassion and compassionate.

And we see it all the way through the Word.

AMEN