

The compassionate Christ

Compassion is a sympathetic pity and concern for the sufferings or misfortunes of others. However it does not remain a feeling of pity and concern but true compassion enters the world of those who are suffering to ease their suffering in any way possible. God saw the misery of His people in Egypt, He heard their cries, He was concerned about their suffering, and He came down to rescue them. (Exodus 3: 7 – 8). Our compassion mostly stopped after seeing, hearing and being concerned. A mere sympathetic feeling that doesn't do anything for anyone in need. Godly compassion always moves on to service.

Matthew 9: 35 – 38

1) Demonstrating compassion

- Jesus didn't first talk about compassion but first demonstrated it.
- God is a compassionate God and compassion is something that is an integral part of His nature. In other words He does works of compassion because He is compassionate and not that he is compassionate because He does works of compassion.
 - The more we are transformed into Christlikeness the more compassionate we'll become and thus the more works of compassion we'll do
 - Our level of compassion is one indication of our level of spiritual maturity.
 - Spiritual maturity isn't marked by how often we attend church, pray, read the Bible and even recite Bible verses by heart. It's marked by our Christlikeness in character and action – active and reactive
- Physical suffering invokes the most compassion because of the obvious nature of the need. However people have needs on all levels that cry out for compassion.
- Jesus didn't only focus on one area of need but He had holistic compassion that saw all areas of human need – emotional / intellectual, spiritual and physical
 - He taught in their synagogues – brings about wholeness of thinking
 - He proclaimed the good news of the kingdom – brings about faith for salvation
 - He healed the sick – brings about physical wholeness.
- He went through the towns and cities
 - He went where the need was. He didn't wait for those with needs come to Him
 - Where would Jesus have us go to demonstrate His compassion?
 - Do we pass people in the streets who are in need? Do we have hearts of compassion for them?

2) Seeing the need with compassion

- We can so often see needs around us but not with compassion.
- Jesus saw the crowds and He had compassion on them.
- Often needs around us can so overwhelm us that we can become hardened to them.
- We can't meet every need that we are confronted with but neither should we be compassionless.
 - "If to be feelingly alive to the sufferings of my fellow-creatures is to be a fanatic, I am one of the most incurable fanatics ever permitted to be at large." William Wilberforce
- The need mentioned here is twofold:
 - They were harassed – meaning faint.
 - The same word is used for the crowds that they might collapse on the way home before Jesus fed the 4000
 - People are often physically hungry but they are also emotionally and spiritually exhausted.

- When we speak to people do we listen between the lines to hear what they're really saying?
- When a lady talks about having lost her children twenty years ago do we hear her cry for healing of the heart?
- When someone complains about a matter constantly do we concern ourselves with a deeper issue that she desperately needs freedom from?
- They were helpless – meaning cast down or cast away. It has the connotation of having been flung out as garbage.
 - Many people in our society feel like they have been marginalised and disregarded by society.
 - This may be because of being unemployed, being homeless, being poor, a substance abuser, or even from a certain country or race.
 - Jesus never discriminated against anyone but had compassion on everyone – a Roman who represented an oppressive regime, a Samaritan who was despised by the Jews, a leper who was cast out of society.
 - A Tamil friend showed me what it means to love unconditionally when he took me to a leper colony in India and hugged the lepers and treated them as he treated everyone else.
- They were like sheep without a shepherd
 - Without a shepherd the sheep had no chance of survival at the time of Jesus. They would be easy prey for predators.
 - At that time they were easy prey for the Pharisees and teachers of the law who would burden them with law upon law without lifting a finger to help them carry their loads.
 - They were following Jesus because they were longing for a true shepherd. One who would care for them as His own.
 - One who would provide for their needs, leads them to a place of rest, restores their brokenness, protects them and guides them on the path of righteousness.

3) Imparting compassion

- Jesus looks at the crowd of hurting, broken and lost people as a ripe harvest.
- There are many people who are ripe to come into the kingdom but there are too few workers to find them.
- Jesus said that he came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19: 10)
 - If this is so then we need many labourers to go into our communities to seek and save the lost, who are ripe for the harvest, amongst us.
 - What He's really saying is that the harvest is lost because too few people are bringing it in.
 - Too few have His compassion for this lost world.
- We are told to ask the Lord of the Harvest to send out workers.
- Prayer – time spent with God – gets the heart of God, the compassion of God for the lost and hurting.
- Jesus doesn't attempt to do all the work Himself. He imparts His compassion to His followers for two reasons:
 - To be like Him in compassion
 - To do the work that He came to do with compassion.
- Rub shoulders with compassionate people and become compassionate in Christlikeness.
- What are you imparting to others?