

HE HAD COMPASSION ON THEM

Matthew 9:18-38

Key Verse: 9:36

“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.”

This passage well describes Jesus’ messianic ministry in Galilee. Jesus healed the sick, drove out evil spirits and taught the word of God to people. Jesus cared for each person who came to him with all his attention and affection. Jesus had compassion on suffering people. Jesus was not at all burdened to serve them. In fact, Jesus found joy in doing so. When we have the compassion of Jesus, we can be joyful shepherds. When we have the compassion of Jesus, the world looks beautiful. Without the compassion of Jesus, we burn out and become mechanical and grumpy. As we study this passage today, may Jesus’ marvelous compassion come into our hearts.

First, Jesus heals two women (18-26).

Verse 18 begins, “While he was saying this....” Jesus had just demonstrated his authority to forgive sins by healing a paralytic. Jesus can heal any kind of spiritual paralysis. Jesus’ power to forgive sins is an explosive force, like new wine. It could not be contained by brittle old wineskins, that is, by the ritualistic religious system and formalistic leaders. No. A new era in God’s history had dawned and it would be unlike anything his people had experienced before. People were amazed. They began to see new possibilities. They began to think “outside the box,” with sin and death being the box. They began to have faith in Jesus and to come to Jesus with their problems.

Look at verse 18b. “...a ruler came and knelt before him and said, ‘My daughter has just died. But come and put your hand on her, and she will live.’” This man was a ruler, that is, a synagogue ruler. As such, he must have been well-educated, successful and influential. Many such men are proud of their power and influence. But this man came and knelt humbly before Jesus to make a request. He knew that his tiny administrative authority was nothing. He recognized Jesus’ spiritual authority. Jesus can forgive sins, and even give life, by raising the dead. Still, for this man to kneel before Jesus could have been very costly. The religious establishment was turning against Jesus. To kneel before Jesus could mean the end of his career. But this man did not care. He was ready to lose everything to gain Jesus’ favor. Why did he do this? It was because he loved his daughter. When she died, he felt he was losing everything. At first, he was helpless. Then, he remembered Jesus. He believed Jesus could help him, and he came to Jesus.

We learn something from this man. A good father loves his daughter more than his career. Instead of working overtime, he spends precious time with his daughter. I hope that David Hull may have many dates with daughter Danielle, especially when she is a teenager. Moreover, a good father has faith in Jesus. In the time of crisis, he comes to Jesus. Jesus can help our children no matter what the problem is. We must come to Jesus in prayer instead of just looking at the problem.

Look at verse 19. “Jesus got up and went with him, and so did his disciples.” Jesus was teaching his disciples. Maybe Jesus was in mid-sentence. But when he heard the plea of this father, his heart was moved and he got up and went with him. It was Jesus’ compassion.

Look at verses 20-21. “Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. She said to herself, ‘If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed.’” She must have been anemic and weak. She was also regarded as unclean by the law of Moses (Lev 15:25). Such women were prohibited from contact with others. She could have no social life. She could have no hope of marriage. She had been suffering with the same bleeding problem for twelve long years. Let’s put this into perspective. Twelve years ago, Bill Clinton was into his first term as president, “Forrest Gump” won the Academy Award for Best Picture, and Steve Stasinos was still in high school. It seemed that this woman’s life would be consumed by struggling with her bleeding problem.

Then one day she heard about Jesus. Jesus was healing every disease and sickness. Faith in Jesus sprouted in her heart. By faith, she came out of her house and went to Jesus. There was a thronging crowd around Jesus. People were pushing and shoving as they moved toward the ruler’s house. It was not easy for this weak woman to break

through and come to Jesus. It must have required all of her physical strength, plus great determination to come to Jesus. More than that, she had to overcome self-consciousness. It was illegal for her to come to Jesus. She could be discovered at any moment and driven away in shame and humiliation. She felt that everyone was looking at her suspiciously. It may have been more difficult for this woman to come to Jesus than it was for the ruler. She came to Jesus as a matter of life and death. Those who come to Jesus with this kind of faith will get Jesus' attention.

The outward manifestation of faith for the ruler and the woman were quite different. The ruler came in front of Jesus, knelt down and spoke openly about what his problem was. The woman snuck up behind Jesus and just touched his cloak without saying a word. She was a kind of spiritual pickpocket. And yet Jesus responded to both of them. Jesus doesn't get hung up on outward appearances. Jesus sees our hearts. When we come to Jesus with faith in our hearts, Jesus is willing to have a personal meeting with us.

Look at verse 22. "Jesus turned and saw her. 'Take heart, daughter,' he said, 'your faith has healed you.' And the woman was healed from that moment." Here we learn the mind of Jesus. Though there were many in the crowd, Jesus turned and saw this woman. Jesus was on the way to the ruler's house, yet he stopped and paid attention to a sick woman. Jesus called her "daughter." To Jesus, she was the only person in the universe. Jesus didn't mind that she had broken the ceremonial law. Jesus was not squeamish because of her touch. Jesus was so glad that she came to him. Jesus blessed her faith abundantly. Jesus loved this nameless woman more than the ruler loved his dear daughter.

Jesus' words changed the woman's life. When Jesus said, "Take heart, daughter," the peace of God came into her heart. Her emotional turmoil was stilled. She was sure that Jesus had accepted her faith, healed her body, and welcomed her into his family. As she rose from Jesus' presence, she was like a rising star in the sky that began to shine with the glory of God. She launched into a wonderful new life as a child of God. She must have been singing, "I have found a wondrous Savior, Jesus Christ the soul's delight." As we have studied in Matthew's gospel, Jesus' physical healing points us toward his spiritual healing. There are many physically healthy people who have spiritual wounds. Some have been abused, betrayed and abandoned. Some suffer from a rebellious spirit, anger, bitterness, or fear. Our society promotes a victim's mentality that blames others and wallows in self-pity. This is the devil's deception. There is no reason to remain wounded. Jesus heals anyone who comes to him, making him or her a precious child of God.

After healing this woman, Jesus continued on his way. Look at verses 23-24. "When Jesus entered the ruler's house and saw the flute players and the noisy crowd, he said, 'Go away. The girl is not dead but asleep.' But they laughed at him." Here, "flute players" does not refer to concert soloists, like Mary Kim, who played so beautifully yesterday. Rather, "flute players and the noisy crowd" were professional mourners. Their job was to make the atmosphere sorrowful and to promote wailing. In this way, bereaved people could overcome their state of shock and go through the grieving process. By helping them wail, the professional mourners provided a kind of social service and were well paid. These days many rock stars are like professional mourners.

However, to Jesus, the professional mourners were totally unneeded. In fact, they were a bad influence. Jesus told them to go away because the girl was not dead but asleep. Jesus sees physical death as sleep. Jesus is the God of the spirits of all mankind. Jesus can bring a person's spirit back to his body. Jesus went in and touched her hand and she got up. Refreshed and energetic, she made a bright smile at her parents. She jumped to her feet and was ready to go to dance class, and next, pom practice. Jesus has power to raise the dead.

Not only does Jesus raise the physically dead, but Jesus raises the spiritually dead. At one time, we were all dead in sin. But Jesus raises us to life when we believe in him (Eph 2:4-5). Grace Jr. was once dead in her sins. She was a kind of romantic philosopher. But Jesus touched her and made her alive in spirit. Now she studies hard and is doing well in law school. She decided to marry a man of God by faith and will have a wedding ceremony on June 10. Grace Yang was once dead in sin and enjoyed window shopping in malls as though it was her purpose of life. But Jesus made her alive with his love and power. She began to care for Bible students with the love of God. Last weekend, she used her shopping talent to serve North American staff members. Many young American girls and boys do not know Jesus. They are dead in sin. They have only dead hopes and are full of despair. But with one touch of Jesus they can be raised to life and become children of God. May Jesus touch them through one-to-one Bible study.

Second, Jesus heals the blind and mute (27-34).

Look at verse 27. “As Jesus went on from there, two blind men followed him, calling out, ‘Have mercy on us, Son of David!’” These men might have been annoying to those around Jesus with their constant calling out. Yet they had remarkable insight into who Jesus is. “Son of David” refers to the Messiah whom God promised to send. The Messiah would be everything to everyone. So they called out to him for help. At first, Jesus seemed to ignore them. He just went indoors. But they felt in their hearts that Jesus cared for them. So they went after him and knocked on the door until it opened. Jesus asked them, “Do you believe that I am able to do this?” They replied, “Yes, Lord.” Then Jesus touched their eyes and said, “According to your faith will it be done to you”; and their sight was restored. Jesus warned them sternly, “See that no one knows about this.” But they went out and spread the news about him all over that region.

It was common knowledge in Israel that giving sight to the blind was something that only the Messiah could do. If Jesus had made a public display of healing these two blind men, he would have gained nationwide attention. But most people had a wrong concept of the Messiah. Jesus wanted to educate people as to the true nature of the Messiah before gaining widespread recognition. To heal the blind men was a risk; it could greatly hinder Jesus’ ministry. Yet Jesus healed them regardless of the consequence. This is the compassion of Jesus.

Look at verses 32-33a. “While they were going out, a man who was demon-possessed and could not talk was brought to Jesus. And when the demon was driven out, the man who had been mute spoke.” People with problems were coming to Jesus one after another, with demand after demand. Jesus was never irritated. Jesus never felt helpless. Jesus welcomed them one by one and healed them spiritually and physically. After Jesus drove out the demon, this man began to talk. He could say, “Thank you, Jesus,” and “I do,” at his wedding ceremony. Isaiah 35:5-6a say, “Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy.” Jesus fulfilled this messianic prophecy.

The crowd was amazed and said, “Nothing like this has ever been seen in Israel.” But the Pharisees said, “It is by the prince of demons that he drives out demons.” Many realized that Jesus was the Messiah. But religious leaders became enemies who slandered Jesus’ person and work in the most vile manner. Even wonderful Jesus had enemies.

Third, Jesus’ compassion spread all over Galilee (35-38).

Jesus did not argue with the Pharisees. Instead, Jesus went through all the towns and villages of Galilee, visiting needy people. Jesus did three things for them. Jesus taught the word of God in the synagogues. The contents of Jesus’ teaching were well explained in the Sermon on the Mount. By teaching the word of God, Jesus edified people’s inner lives and built up love for God and love for others. Jesus also preached the good news of the kingdom. The bad news of sin, death and the devil’s work dominates the world without Jesus. It is the reality that most people live in without realizing it. Jesus’ preaching proclaimed his authority to forgive sins, his power to drive out demons, and to raise the dead. Jesus’ preaching liberates men from the darkness and brings the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven. Jesus also healed every disease and sickness. Matthew described this through nine specific acts of healing and various other works of healing in chapters 8 and 9. Jesus ministry had a balance of teaching, preaching and healing. Those who do his work should also have this balance. Our Bible teaching must edify people in the love of God and love for others. Our preaching should be powerful with the presence of the Holy Spirit. Healing, especially spiritual healing, should be evident in our ministry as the fruit of shepherding with the love of God.

Look at verse 36. “When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” Wherever Jesus went crowds of people came to him. They were obvious sinners, needy people, sick people, and demon-possessed people. Jesus did not blame them for being that way. Jesus saw each of them with compassion as sheep who needed a shepherd. Jesus thought that if he took care of them they would be healed. Jesus believed they could all become godly and useful people. Jesus’ heart went out to them as a father to his precious children. Jesus’ way of reaching them was personal. Jesus wanted to shepherd each one of them according to their specific need. Jesus was limited by his body. Yet there was a way.

Look at verses 37-38. “Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.’” Jesus wants his disciples to share his compassion. Jesus urged his disciples to pray. The prayer topic is, “Lord, send out workers into your harvest field.” There are so many students on all of our college campuses who are harassed and helpless. They have experienced the breakup of their families, social disorder, hypocrisy among religious leaders, and political corruption. They are crying out for the love of a shepherd and ultimately for the love of God. If only they have shepherds who care for them personally, they can be healed and become great men and women of God. Today we learned Jesus’ compassion. Let’s pray to practice Jesus’ compassion. Let’s pray that many shepherds may be raised on our campuses.