

Sermon: Christ's Compassion for His People

Scripture: Matthew 14:13-21; Romans 9:1-5

Date: 6th August 2017

Introduction

Meaning of Compassion - sympathetic consciousness of others' distress together with a desire to alleviate it (Merriam Webster Dictionary)

"A broader meaning for "compassion" means - "to show pity," "to love," and "to show mercy." Other near synonyms for compassion in English are "to be loved by," "to show concern for," "to be tenderhearted," and "to act kindly." (Barker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology)

"Mother Teresa – Do something beautiful for God." Through her Missionaries of Charity, "it would care for the hungry, the naked, the homeless, the crippled, the blind, the lepers, all those people who feel unwanted, unloved, uncared for throughout society, people that have become a burden to the society and are shunned by everyone".

"Pope Francis' Compassionate Moment with a Sick Man." (2013). The 76-year-old leader of the Catholic Church shared a compassionate moment with a man whose face appeared to be plagued with boils. Pope Francis kissed the man's head and then held him as he prayed.

I. Jesus Ministered to the Crowd Despite His Grief

Matthew 14:13 reads, "*Now when Jesus **heard this**, he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself.*"

1. News of the Death of John the Baptist.

King Herod had John beheaded.

Matthew 14:12 reads, "*And his disciples came and took the body and buried it, and they went and told Jesus.*"

Of John, Jesus said, "*Truly, I say to you, among those born of women there has arisen no one greater than John the Baptist.*" (Matthew 11:11)

2. Jesus' Response to the News

Matthew 14:13, "... *he withdrew from there in a boat to a desolate place by himself.*"

Jesus had to withdraw to a desolate place so that he could be by himself. The news of John's death must have troubled Jesus.

The Lord Jesus, retreated from the crowd so that he could spend time perhaps to grief and perhaps to reflect. He needed to retreat and to prepare himself for his mission.

3. Interruption to Jesus' Plan

Was Jesus' heart's desire met? "*But when the crowds heard it, they followed him on foot from the towns.* ¹⁴ *When he went ashore he saw a great crowd...*"

What was Jesus to do with them? He needed space to be by himself. He needed privacy. Did he rebuke or reprimand them?

Jesus looked at the "unwelcomed" welcoming party and the Bible says, "... *he had compassion on them and healed their sick.*" From verses 15-21, we also know that his compassion moved him to give them food to eat.

4. Compassion and Interruption.

It looked like Jesus' compassion overcame his personal grief. The needs of the crowd superseded his personal need. It was like Jesus permitted compassion to interrupt his grief!

This is the power of compassion – others first, you later. This is the work of God's Spirit within us!

We speak about becoming Christ's disciples. This means that we want to be like Christ, to have a heart of compassion – we want to reach out to others even if it means that our plans, our schedules, are interrupted!

Compassion and cheerfulness I believe go hand in hand. In Romans 12:8, we read, "... the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness." If your reaching out is not being compelled by compassion, you will sow and reap, "Factor GMC – Grumble, Murmur and Complain."

II) Jesus' Demonstration of Compassion: He Healed the Sick

Let us note now the demonstration of compassion of Jesus for his people. First, compassion moved him to heal the sick. (Other references: Matthew 4:24; Mark 1:32-32; Luke 4:40)

With eyes and heart of compassion he saw those afflicted with various diseases, affliction and demonic oppression and he reached out to touch them and heal them.

Today, all around us we also can witness this same human suffering of "diseases, affliction and demonic oppression." We need to pray for compassion to reach out to minister to them.

Consider the medical conditions of members of our congregation. Are we moved with compassion to minister healing to one another?

III) Jesus' Demonstration of Compassion – He Fed the Hungry

Secondly, compassion moved Jesus to reach out to meet the physical needs of the people. As much as the disciples wanted to give food to the hungry crowd, they knew that their "resources" at hand was just "five loaves and two fish."

The Lord Jesus took charge of the situation. He received the “small resources” of five loaves and two fish, blessed them, and miraculously multiplied them.

In carrying out the act of compassion of feeding the hungry, in a sense he did it in collaboration with the disciples and one little boy. Christ has given unto us the privilege to partner with him in this ministry of compassion which seek to feed the poor and needy.

This is a reminder to us that where the Lord is, there is no lack. It is in his presence that we will experience his miracle and his provisions.

With regards the “small resources” it is an indication to us that the ministry of feeding the poor can be overwhelming, thus it has to be done in total faith trusting upon the Lord.

Conclusion

Instead of looking inwards to console himself, Jesu looked outwards to have compassion on the sick and the hungry.

Today, as the Lord’s disciples, we too are asked by the Lord to be involved in the ministry of compassion. With a heart of compassion we must also be ready for interruptions to our schedules or programme. Let us begin to demonstrate compassion in small, simple ways.

Illustration from the Methodist Covenant Group (MCG)

The members are encouraged to put into practice “Works of Mercy” (Loving our Neighbour) and “Works of Piety” (Loving God). Under “Works of Mercy” they have to carry out “Acts of Compassion.” (For more information Google search “Covenant Discipleship Group.”)

Prayer of St Teresa of Avila

Lord Christ,

You have no body on earth but ours,

No hands but ours,

No feet but ours.

Ours are the eyes through which your compassion

Must look out on the world.

Ours are the feet by which you may still

Go about doing good.

Ours are the hands with which

You bless people now.

Bless our minds and bodies,

That we may be a blessing to others. Amen.

As Christ’s disciples may we, moved by compassion, indeed be the Lord’s hands and feet to bless others for his praise and glory. Amen.