

Message Date: 08-23-20

Communion Sunday

Message Title: The God of Compassion

✠ Have you ever struggled believing God is good?

- ***Have you ever struggled believing God is good? COMPASSIONATE? That he truly, deeply, loves and cares for his children- for YOU?***
- ***There's lots of reasons many people don't believe God is good, much less compassionate, even people who readily believe that God is REAL, maybe even that the Bible, NT, is true.***
- ***Classic reasons, questions... Why do bad things happen to good people (inverse) If God is God of Justice, compassion, why does this happen?***
- ***As a student of history, I'm confronted with simple reality that a great majority of human history (all history, not just certain people and times) is the history of human suffering, injustice, often both at the same time.***
- ***OR, maybe the reason to doubt God's compassion is much more personal. For many people, maybe you, their life story is characterized by lack of love and acceptance, hardship, neglect or abandonment, even abuse. NOT UNCOMMON for such a life experience lead people to conclude that God, if he exists...***
 - ***Is NOT GOOD***
 - ***Is disconnected, unaware, or doesn't care***
 - ***Something wrong about you, so God is punishing you or someone you love...***
 - ***IN ANY CASE, GOD CERTAINLY ISN'T LOVING AND COMPASSIONATE***
- ***How would you respond to that?***
- ***This is HUGE QUESTION believers have wrestled with for thousands of years... there are important discussions and answers, as well as books that explore this topic in very honest ways. But today, I want to look at this question- through the lens of SCRIPTURE- specifically, a story from the life of JESUS.***
- ***CONTEXT. Last week we talked about how God calls us, as His disciples, into a life of SERVANTHOOD. There was a crisis in the church, and the Holy Spirit led the disciples through this crisis by raising up leaders into new places of SERVICE, caring, compassion***
- ***Our passage today is out of Matthew chapter 20, and RIGHT BEFORE our story, we see Jesus give his famous lesson about being a servant... Matthew 20:26..***

whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

- ***Jesus himself said.. “I came to be your servant... to give my life FOR YOU”***
- ***THEN, Matthew goes on to show us what this servant heart of Jesus looks like, with the famous story of Jesus and two blind men outside the city gates of Jericho.***
- ***READ BY REEVE AND MICHELE***

²⁹ As they were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed Him. ³⁰ And two blind men sitting by the road, hearing that Jesus was passing by, cried out, “Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!” ³¹ The crowd sternly told them to be quiet, but they cried out all the more, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!” ³² And Jesus stopped and called them, and said, “What do you want Me to do for you?” ³³ They said to Him, “Lord, *we want* our eyes to

be opened.”³⁴ Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they regained their sight and followed Him.

– **Few big picture things about this story**

† The Son of David

– **These blind men refer to Jesus as “Son of David.” For the people of Israel, the term “Son of David” referred to the promised Messiah. We see that even before His death and resurrection, some people were ALREADY recognizing Jesus as the Messiah**

– **Today’s story is by no means unique in the Gospels.**

† Jesus was incredibly stern toward the legalism and hypocrisy of Israel’s religious rulers, but deeply COMPASSIONATE to the hurting people of Israel.

Matthew 9:36 *When he saw the crowds, he had **compassion** on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.*

Matthew 14:14 *When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had **compassion** on them and healed their sick.*

Matthew 15:32 *Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I have **compassion** for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way.”*

– **Throughout Gospels we see examples of Jesus’ compassion!**

– **One more thought here...**

† Today’s story, and other Gospel stories like them, have been described as the INTERRUPTED ministry of Jesus

– **Jesus to be on the way to a destination, when He is interrupted by the needs of a person, and moved by His compassion He stops and responds. Jesus’ plans were never too important to ignore the needs of the people He encountered.**

– **WITH THAT, let’s go to our story, which takes place outside of Jericho, a city not far from Jerusalem, when Jesus was passing by...**

† Jesus was passing by...

²⁹ As they were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed Him. ³⁰ And two blind men sitting by the road, hearing that Jesus was passing by, cried out, “Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!”

– **Who were these blind men? They were both beggars, very likely put here by the side of a busy road by friends or family. Like the man begging outside the temple gates that we learned about in Acts 3, they were hoping to receive just enough sympathy and money to get them through the day. There would have been no hope of any actual change to their true underlying problem, which is that they were BLIND.**

– **At least, they never had that hope until they heard that the person approaching was Jesus.**

– **Small observation here. There’s a person in this story who is not mentioned, but is very important. It’s the person (or persons) who at some point had told these men about Jesus—who He was, and what God was doing through him.**

- **And so, when they heard that Jesus was approaching, they cried out in a way they never would have done to anyone else... “Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!”**
- **And here we have**

† A remarkable contrast

- **between the reaction of the crowd- people like you and me, and the response of Jesus himself.**

³¹ *The crowd sternly told them to be quiet,*

- **For the crowd, these beggars were a common sight. They were the people that become very easy to ignore as you went about your day- people seen more as a nuisance than anything else. Certainly not anyone worthy of taking Jesus time at this point in his ministry. If there was any way to describe these men, it was ‘not worthy’. They were the ‘less than’, and they were treated that way.**

but they cried out all the more, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!” ³² And Jesus stopped and called them,

- **Think of this! Incredibly profound image. These men represented the bottom of humanity... and Jesus, the GOD OF ALL CREATION, heard them, stopped, and turned his attention to them. HE CALLED TO THEM.**
- **Famous passage in Philippians 2...**

Philippians 2:6-7 Jesus.. Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; ⁷ rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

- **When Paul says Jesus, being GOD, was made in human likeness, he wasn’t talking about the likeness of human kings, rulers, most powerful, most wealthy- although his promise is for these people as well.**
- **Jesus’ human likeness was like THESE TWO BLIND MEN. These beggars. The least of these. I can imagine Jesus thoughts as he heard their voice... as he stopped, looked, and saw their faces... “I CAME TO BE ONE OF THEM”... THESE MEN, it is for THEM that my father sent me.**

† An obvious question.

- **AND THEN, Jesus asks a question that on its face is so obvious almost ridiculous, but in reality is might be the most important question we could ever be asked.**

and said, “What do you want Me to do for you?” ³³ They said to Him, “Lord, we want our eyes to be opened.”

- **What did they want? DUH! They wanted to see! Of course that’s what they wanted! Why do you think Jesus asked them this question?**
- **Jesus knew their immediate physical need, but he also knew their even greater spiritual need. They didn’t just need their eyes opened, they needed they eyes of their hearts to be opened.**

- **And seeing these men, physically and spiritually enslaved by blindness, Jesus was moved with compassion, and he acted.**

✠ Moved with compassion

Moved with compassion, Jesus touched their eyes; and immediately they regained their sight and followed Him.

- **Note what happens here.**
 - **Moved with compassion. This isn't just a passing thing, where Jesus waves his hand, heals them, and keeps going. The word MOVED carries with it the idea of being stirred emotionally. Jesus SEES these men, he CARES for them, and is emotionally and spiritually moved to stop and intervene in the story of their lives. HE LOVES THEM.**
 - **JESUS touches their eyes. He makes physical contact with them. He didn't have to do that, and Jesus crossed a very powerful cultural taboo to do so. These men would have been dirty. Sitting on the ground next to a busy dirt road. They were 'unclean' in more ways than one. They were poor. They were probably astonished that Jesus had heard them and stopped, but for him to TOUCH them? This was nothing they could have imagined. AGAIN, think of this image! These men, the outcasts at the bottom of society, are being touched by God himself. AND WHEN THEY OPENED THEIR EYES FOR FIRST TIME, the first thing they see is the face of Jesus.**
 - **Immediately they are healed. But they didn't just receive physical healing. Matthew records that these men GOT UP and followed Jesus. They became his disciples.**
- **THIS IS ALL WE KNOW of these men's story. That they followed Jesus. But I'm going to let my imagination take this forward for just a moment. It's altogether possible, if not even probable, that these men continued to follow Jesus. It was about a day's journey on foot from Jericho to Jerusalem, and if you go on in Matthew, the very next thing that happens is Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem, and the cross is just one week away.**
- **I can imagine these two men listening to Jesus teach during that week, watching him clean the moneychangers out of the temple, and just days later, watching Him die.**
- **IN THAT MOMENT, these men whose lives had been changed by Jesus' compassion for THEM, witnessed God's greatest act of compassion for all humanity, as Jesus took their (AND OUR) brokenness, sin, and our own spiritual blindness upon himself, and he took it to the cross, and to the grave.**
- **And then, I can imagine these two men, maybe a week later, standing next to the resurrected Jesus, meeting him again in person as many people did.**
- **And seeing the reality of Jesus resurrection, realizing that Jesus hadn't just given them new sight, he had given them a new LIFE.**
- **BRING THIS BACK TO US. Two things:**
 - **FIRST, scripture proclaims that Jesus IS the God of compassion. He demonstrated his love and compassion once and for all through the cross, and we may receive and experience the goodness of his compassion in our lives right now, through FAITH.**
 - **But Jesus' compassion is not only experienced through our understanding of what Jesus did on the Cross, and what is now TRUE OF US because what Jesus has done in our lives. These are incredible truths that bring LIFE and FREEDOM... but Jesus is also working to**

reveal his love and compassion in our world RIGHT NOW, in the midst of people's very real physical and emotional needs.

✠ How does Jesus show His compassion in our world today? He does so through US.

– ***Through how we- those who have received compassion- show that compassion to others.***

Colossians 3:12-13 ¹²Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

✠ Jesus' question to you

– ***SECOND- I'll close with this. Jesus' question to the two blind men... WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO FOR YOU?***

– ***Imagine that Jesus is asking that question to you. God himself, looking into your heart, and asking... WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO FOR YOU?***

– ***What is your answer? Is it limited to your pressing needs right now, as real as they may be, or is there a deeper need... a spiritual need... that ONLY Christ can meet?***

– ***These men answered.. Lord, we want our eyes to be opened. Years later, moved by the Holy Spirit, PAUL answered Jesus' question with his own desire for eyes to be opened... but not so that we can see physically... so we may SEE SPIRITUALLY... the hope, the riches of being a part of his family, and his power in our lives.***

Ephesians 1:17-19 I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. 18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe.

– ***When Paul answered Jesus' question, his answer was... LORD... I want to know YOU. Nothing else even comes close.***

Philippians 3:8-11 What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. 10 I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, 11 and so, somehow, attaining to the resurrection from the dead.

– ***FRIENDS... we may KNOW CHRIST, we may truly live in the GOOD of his love, his compassion, his LIFE... because of His ultimate act of compassion when Christ gave his life.***

- ***We are going to take this time to remember Christ's sacrifice, as He taught us to remember. In 1 Corinthians 11:23-26***
- ***As we read this, and participate ourselves, think about Christ giving his life, so through faith in Him, we could receive a new His life. As you remember his sacrifice now, consider Jesus asking us... asking you... WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO FOR YOU?***

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.