

The compassion of Jesus

Please read Mark 1 v 29-42; then pray; *Compassionate and gracious God, may your Word and Spirit challenge and equip me to serve you with all my heart, mind, soul and strength, in Jesus name, Amen.*

As Jesus of Nazareth began his ministry in the power and with the anointing of the Holy Spirit, the most outstanding and talked about feature of his ministry was **his authority**. (21-28) The people in Capernaum, and the other villages and towns elsewhere in Galilee were amazed, excited and impressed by the authority of Jesus (22, 27) – both his teaching authority (27) and his authority over evil spirits (27-28, 34, 39). His authority to **drive out evil and heal sickness** alerted and attracted the needy population, (32-34) and to the point where **everyone was looking for him!** (37) Jesus was in big demand! (see previous sermon on the authority of Jesus for more background)

However, a vital question arises at this point. In what way did Jesus exercise and demonstrate his unique authority which was the authority of the Kingdom of God? Was there something that particularly directed and controlled the use and exercise of his extraordinary and powerful authority? Once again, the answer to this question is supplied in this action-packed first chapter of Mark.

The authority of Jesus was directed and controlled by the compassion of Jesus/God.

This is what will now consider as we examine the **healing ministry of Jesus** and particularly as it is seen through the healing and cleansing of the leper. (40-45)

Mark Dupont in the book *Healing Today*, is right to point out the following;

It was the compassion of God that compelled Jesus to do the countless miracles and healings he did. It was the compassion of God that led Jesus to train, equip and encourage his disciples to do the things he did.

It is not surprising in the least, that Jesus, the Son of God (1:1), should reveal and demonstrate the essential character and attributes of God whilst here in this world. The Son perfectly reflected the character of his Father. Jesus was, to quote the author of Hebrews “the exact representation of God’s being”. (Hebrews 1:3). Jesus was **Immanuel** – *God with us* and He displayed and lived out the perfect character of God in this world. And at the heart of God’s character is **compassion** – compassion for all He has made. The Psalmist constantly celebrated God’s pure compassion.

*The Lord is gracious and **compassionate**, slow to anger and rich in love. The Lord is good to all; he has **compassion** on all he has made. (Psalm 145: 8-9)*

The most famous and often repeated description of God in the Old Testament is the one that was first revealed to Moses, but then became central to the ongoing revelation and understanding of God.

*And he (God) passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The Lord, the Lord, the **compassionate** and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. (Exodus 34:6-7, see also Nehemiah 9:17, Psalm 86:15, 103:8, Joel 2:13 and Jonah 4:2).*

Pure compassion lies at the heart of God’s almighty and spectacular being. Scripture reveals and reveals in the fact that God is **FULL of compassion**. (James 5:11, Psalm 116:5) God’s compassion is great! (Psalm 119:156) God is the **Father of compassion** (2 Corinthians 1:3) and the God of *all* comfort. We see this “Father of compassion” in one of Jesus’ most famous parables – the parable of the prodigal son;

But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was FILLED WITH COMPASSION for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. (Luke 15:20)

Is it any wonder that Jesus Christ was full of compassion for the sick and the broken? Here is God with us in this world – God the Son, full of the Spirit of God and filled to overflowing with the compassion of God. And this is what comes to the fore in Jesus’ healing ministry and in this encounter with the leper. Pure compassion and mercy underpin his healing ministry and healing touch, which is a compassionate touch for the wounded, the diseased, the disfigured and the broken. Here is the compassionate Servant and Son of God, armed with the authority of the Kingdom – ready and *willing* (v 41) to use that authority as He is stirred and directed to by the compassion within him. As the hymn “Love divine” expresses it; ***Jesus, Thou art all compassion, pure unbounded love Thou art.***

Look at the story of the leper. He comes to Jesus desperate for mercy and cleansing. He believes Jesus can cleanse and heal his serious condition which dominates his miserable life. His plea is moving;

If you are willing, you can make me clean.

But before we hear or see a response from Jesus, Mark records these significant words;

Filled with compassion....

We have already heard from Scripture that God is **full** of compassion and mercy. Now we see this in his own Son.

Jesus saw the enormity of the need before him, and he was aroused by and filled with compassion for the leper. Then we see Jesus’s love *move into action* through the cleansing and healing of this desperate individual. Seeing Jesus at work here reveals to us the *true nature of compassion* – and we as Christ’s followers and servants need to understand what compassion is and how to share it. If compassion lies at the heart of God’s eternal being, and at the centre of Jesus’s ministry and use of authority, it must be something that is also demonstrated *through us and in our service to this world* with its ocean of need.

So, the question is, what is compassion?

Firstly, compassion is a lively combination of qualities, rather than just one single quality. Several qualities come together in union to make up compassion. Those qualities include; mercy, goodness, kindness, patience, wisdom and generosity. All these qualities are at work and expressed in God’s character and in the life of Jesus, and these are qualities that can be seen in those who are made in God’s image, in you and me, especially as we experience the Spirit *remaking and renewing us in God’s image and likeness*.

Secondly, compassion is definitely something that is ***felt*** both **within the person** showing compassion and within the person receiving compassion. Jesus felt compassion for the leper, but the leper also experienced and felt Jesus’s compassion for him. When faced with 4000 hungry people, Jesus expressed his feelings of compassion for them. (Mark 8:2) Jesus felt compassion for Martha and Mary after the death of their brother Lazarus. (John 11:33-35). Jesus regularly felt compassion for the sick and suffering, and he healed them. Suffering and human sorrow moved him to feel compassion. There was an internal, visceral sense of emotion that built up on the inside of Jesus. Commenting on the story of Jesus and the leper in the book *Healing Today*, co-author Mark Stibbe writes;

The verb in the original Greek text is splagchnizomai. The first part of that verb, splagchna, literally refers to the bowels or the “guts”. Loosely translated, this means that Jesus felt overwhelming compassion for the leper in the deepest parts of his being. When Jesus prayed for the leper’s healing, he was moved viscerally, not just emotionally. He literally yearned for the man’s well-being.

Many of you will understand what I am talking/writing about. You will have felt compassion in your stomach rising up to your heart, and perhaps spilling out of your mouth and into an act of service. Have you ever felt deep compassion for someone or for some situation? Returning to what I said about Jesus in the presence of the bereaved Martha and Mary, John in his gospel, writes;

*When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along also weeping, **he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.** (John 11:33)*

Can you relate to this feeling of being deeply moved in spirit and troubled by someone’s sorrow and pain? If so, this is the beginning of compassion welling up within you.

Thirdly, and most importantly, compassion, true compassion, always moves on from strong feelings to merciful and kind action. Compassion acts! Compassion delivers an active and practical response to the suffering being witnessed. So, Jesus reached out and touched the leper and healed him. Jesus felt compassion for the hungry crowds of 5000 and 4000 people – **then he fed them**. Jesus felt compassion for the widow of Nain and so **raised her only son back to life**. Compassion is therefore a practical demonstration of care and love.

Fourthly, who did Christ, and who does God show compassion towards? Scripture reveals that God is compassionate and good toward all He has made, including animals (Psalm 145:9, Jonah 4:11), but God is roused to a special compassion for the *desperately sick and suffering*. Compassion was stirred up within Christ for the very desperate and destitute who he met.

Did you notice in the story the utter desperation of this leper? None were more poor, distressed and desperate in the society of that day than the rejected and stigmatised lepers. The stigma they had to continually carry and contend with was truly pitiful. Notice that when he found Jesus, **he begged him on his knees....** Here is utter desperation staring Jesus in the face. Those who are reduced to begging are truly desperate. Divine compassion responds to human desperation and misery. Those who had to be **“brought”** to Jesus were desperate and needed help getting to wherever he was (v 32).

We see this time and time again in the gospels with Jesus. We see Jairus a synagogue ruler, whose twelve year old little girl is close to death. It is a desperate situation. We here how “seeing Jesus, he fell at his feet and pleaded earnestly with him, *My little daughter is dying. Please come and put your hands on her so that she will be healed and live.* So Jesus went with him.” We hear of Jesus arriving in the area of the Decapolis where “some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk, and they begged him to place his hand on the man.” Desperation again. In the gospels, the compassion of Christ is aroused and demonstrated toward the very desperate, the sick, the diseased, the very hungry, the marginalised, the forgotten, the abandoned, the beggars and the desperately poor. His Kingdom was for them! His compassion opened it up to them!

One of the most tragic things about the last year has been the **restriction on compassion** due to the lockdowns. People wanting to respond to desperate need have not felt able to do so for fear of being accused of breaking lockdown rules. And so many compassionate ministries have been stopped in their tracks meaning that the people who have suffered the most are the poorest, the weakest, and the neediest in our society. God’s heart of compassion must be breaking. I totally sympathise with those who have ignored a so-called rule if they have felt burdened to leave home and help out a

desperately needy friend, loved one or neighbour. Nothing held back or held down the compassion of Jesus Christ! As Christians, we must bear this in mind. You can't put compassion on hold. God will judge a society that withholds or withdraws compassion.

A **fifth** point worth noting because it is made so many times through the compassionate ministry of Jesus, and especially highlighted in his encounter with the leper, is that compassion **often** involves, even demands **human touch**. Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. Touching lepers with mercy, love and compassion was unheard of. It should never have been done. It broke the rules. You know – the rules that were supposed to keep people safe – safe from the dreaded disease. You have to socially distance from lepers at all times. But, **Jesus, filled with compassion, reached out and touched the man**. The Son of God broke the rules. He is ruled only by love and his compassionate instincts.

How frequently in the gospels do we hear about Jesus compassionately touching people that they might receive healing? He laid his hands upon the sick to administer healing power and grace. Earlier in this first chapter of Mark, we are told that he went into a house and healed Simon's mother-in-law who was suffering from a fever.

*So he went to her, **took her hand** and helped her. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.*

Jesus took her by the hand. Taking people by the hand is at the heart of compassionate ministry. Did not the good Samaritan use his hands? Have you not felt the need to do that with a suffering person – the need to simply hold their hand or to help them up? Have you not appreciated it when someone has taken your hand when you were sad, upset, sick or distressed? Compassion involves loving touch – the physical use of our hands.

Once again, during this last awful year, people have been restricted from touching others compassionately; those living in a nursing home prevented from seeing and being comforted by a loved one; those isolated in another part of the country missing being held by another human being; those suffering or dying in a hospital bed, or in their own homes with no hand to hold. How much people, suffering people, have longed for a touch and not received it. In God's name, this need to touch another must be fully restored as swiftly as possible. More than ever before, people are realising the critical importance and uplifting power of human touch – and its direct link to a profound sense of healing, relief, hope and comforting love. And whilst touch has to be administered with wisdom and sensitivity in certain situations due to safeguarding issues, nevertheless, touch is at the heart of all true compassionate caring. We must never forget this. We must never lose this! One of the most precious things you read about in the gospels is the tender *touch of Jesus*. It is crucial in Christian work and mission, and His touch communicated to others comes through *us* today. We offer and provide a touch from the King of love.

In closing, can I challenge you to seriously reflect on the compassion of Jesus. The Bible is full of exhortations for God's people to be compassionate. The apostles Paul, Peter and John regularly wrote of this need for Christians to be *clothed with compassion*. (Colossians 3:12, Ephesians 4:32, 1 Peter 3:8) The daily challenge facing us is to be **imitators of Christ's compassion**.

Our **hearts and HANDS** have to be ready to be used by God in response to the growing tide of human desperation. The desperation facing us all has just got significantly worse due to the pandemic and lockdowns. At Christchurch, we must be alert to the suffering and distress of those who live in our local community. As we emerge from lockdown, and finally engage in *Leading Your Church Into Growth*, uppermost in our hearts and minds must be a desire and vision to reach out with Christ's compassion to a community God loves passionately and compassionately. What will Jesus want us to

do together as a Church to demonstrate that God is “full of compassion”? That will be revealed to us by the Spirit who leads and empowers all compassionate Christian mission. The Spirit will speak to those that have ears to hear and willing hands to respond. What part will you play? What will be your contribution to the work of the Kingdom of God? We are the body of Christ – his hands and feet and touch. May God teach and inspire us to practically love with a heart of compassion. God bless **you** in the compassionate outworking of his kingdom among us!

Amen!