

THE COMPASSION OF THE CHRIST

Luke 7:11-17

“Don’t Cry in Your Bier”

Introduction

The theme verse for the Men’s Retreat in San Antonio is the aftermath of Jesus exorcising Legion out of the demoniac of Gadera.

Mark 5:19 "Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you."

As I prayed about a direction, the word “compassion” seemed key. Two things suggested themselves:

1. First, was there something different about the compassion of Jesus as the God-man?
2. Second, why don’t believers always show the same compassion Jesus did, the compassion of the Christ?

If you go through the Gospel’s you’ll find several instances of compassion failure.

- In Matthew 18, in the Parable of the Unmerciful Servant, the servant who is forgiven an incalculable debt refuses to show compassion on a fellow servant who owed him pocket change. His compassion failed due to self-righteousness.
- In Luke 10:25-37, in the Parable of the Good Samaritan, the priest and the Levite refuse to show compassion to the man who was beaten and robbed. Their compassion failed on account of holding to the letter of the law rather than realizing the spirit of the law.
- In Mark 9:14-29 the disciples of Jesus failed to cast-out a demon from a young boy. Their compassion failed when their initial ministry failed.
- In Mark 8:1-9 Jesus feeds the 4000. His disciples failed in their compassion because they were looking only at the physical resources available to them

I'm sure there are other compassions fails and in each case a compassion killer to be on the lookout for.

The compassion of Jesus cannot fail. Ours, as Christians, can.

The place to start is by seeing the uniqueness of Jesus Christ's compassion.

We have the very first use of the word "compassion" in the Gospel of Luke in verse thirteen of chapter seven. It turns out to be a great 'first use' because we can learn quite a lot about the compassion of Christ from it.

In everyday usage, the word "compassion" expresses a deep emotion, a striving of the innermost being, to pity others and their situation. Another word sometimes used in defining compassion is visceral, to indicate it has definite physical properties. In raw terms, it's a strong emotional reaction to someone else's situation that causes actual physical responses that 'move' you to do something.

Charles Spurgeon says that the word used to describe Jesus' compassion is not to be found in Classical Greek. Nor is it found in the Septuagint, the ancient translation of the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek. It was a word coined by the writers of the Gospels, inspired of course by the Holy Spirit.

This new, coined word indicates there was something about the compassion of Christ that was new, different, and unique. There was something that could not be captured by the normal word or words in use because it went beyond them. It is that 'something' we want to understand as Christians.

If by 'Christian' we mean Christ-like, then we already have this same compassion for our fellow men and women. It is an essential characteristic of the divine nature imparted to us when we were born-again.

Let us, then, look at this first mention of this new word by Luke.

Luke 7:11 Now it happened, the day after, that He went into a city called Nain; and many of His disciples went with Him, and a large crowd.

It was “the day after” the Lord had in Capernaum healed the Centurion’s servant from a distance. No need to visit the sick servant; all Jesus had to do was speak the word and he was healed.

I love it that we can affect people’s lives from great distances. In fact, distance is no obstacle at all as we seek the Lord in prayer. But there’s still something about being with someone, about touching them, that is precious. And that means leaving Capernaum and traveling to Nain.

This is only mention of “Nain” in the Bible. By all accounts it was a small village nestled into the hillside. I love these one-mention places, and (sometimes) people, in the Bible. My son did a series for our men called, “One-Verse Wonders.” They encourage me that it’s not where I am, it’s Who I’m with that’s important.

Jesus was followed by “many of His disciples” and accompanied by “a large crowd.”

Luke 7:12 And when He came near the gate of the city, behold, a dead man was being carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the city was with her.

It’s hard to conceive of a more desperate situation in the first century. Already a “widow,” this woman now had to bury her “only son.” On top of her inconsolable grief as a “mother,” from a social standpoint all hope of both livelihood and lineage were permanently gone.

There is very little that can compare to the death of a child before his or her parents. It just doesn’t seem right to us. No parent should have to bury their child.

The entire scene evokes a visceral reaction from any normal person. Compassion, it would seem, is the only possible reaction a normal human being could have.

Why use this as your background, then, to introduce an entirely new word? I can only conclude that Jesus saw the situation the way everyone else did,

the way that we do, but that He saw something more that required a whole new word to describe it.

Take another look at what Jesus saw. Coming out of the otherwise peaceful village was a funeral procession. There was only one dead man, but everyone following the procession was guaranteed of one certainty. They would each, in their own time, follow him in death. They would each have their own turn on the bier.

Luke is illustrating for us the human condition. From the time a person is born, his life is one long funeral procession towards the grave. In biblical terms we would say all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and the wages of sin is death.

The Lord was moved with a compassion that took the fullness of the eternal situation into account. Long before Jesus arrived at the gates of Nain, He was moved with this compassion in eternity past when He agreed to come as the God-man to resolve the terrible situation of the human race.

It's such a wonderful picture, this encounter at Nain. Here was a dead man, and others who were soon to follow him in death, returning him to the dust of the earth. And just at that moment, in the providence of God, there was the God-man Who could offer him life, and eternal life, and to whosoever would believe in Him.

The very simple lesson I take away from this is that if I am to experience the compassion of Christ, I must see the full eternal situation of every human being I encounter.

The apostle Paul understood this. In Second Corinthians 5:16 he says, "from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh." Sure, we continue to see the outward, physical situation of others. But we see something more than the physical. We see that they are eternal beings, loved by God Who is not willing any should perish but all come to eternal life.

To experience the compassion of Christ, we must continue to see more fully the true, eternal situation of everyone we encounter. They are each a

person on their way to death, each in a funeral procession. It will be eternal death if they do not receive eternal life from Jesus.

Everyone I encounter is someone for whom Christ died. I therefore cannot help but have His compassion upon them.

I mentioned Charles Spurgeon. In his sermon on Christ's compassion he writes,

Now, although this word [for compassion] is not used many times even by the evangelists, yet it may be taken as a clue to the Savior's whole life... If you would sum up the whole character of Christ in reference to ourselves, it might be gathered into this one sentence, "He was moved with compassion."

Whether it was in eternity past, or when Jesus walked the earth, or now that He is seated in Heaven, "compassion" is the sum of His life.

It moved Him, at Nain, to raise the widow's son.

Luke 7:13 When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep."

Can we say, "do not weep?" We can, and we should, if we do it the right way.

The Thessalonians were weeping. Believing loved ones were dying and they thought they had somehow missed-out on the rapture of the church. Paul wrote to them, explaining to them the order of things at Jesus Christ's return for the church: first the resurrection of all those who had died in Christ, then the rapture of living believers.

Along the way he said to them, and to us,

1 Thessalonians 4:13 But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.

It's not, "Don't cry," but rather, "Don't sorrow, don't cry, as if you have no hope."

You might say we exercise an ultimate compassion by putting suffering into its eternal context.

Luke 7:14 Then He came and touched the open coffin, and those who carried him stood still. And He said, "Young man, I say to you, arise."

Notice, if you will, no one asked the Lord to do anything. His compassion motivated Him to act. We can assume, then, that unless we are led to not do something, the Lord would always have us to act with compassion on His behalf.

"Those who carried him stood still." Have you ever had a moment like that? The Lord opens a door of witness and it seems as though everything stops, everyone is listening? It might only last a few moments, but it is supernatural.

Luke 7:15 So he who was dead sat up and began to speak. And He presented him to his mother.

Jesus "presented him to his mother." They were reunited. As much as I'd like to reunite those who suffer loss in this life, I'd rather they know that there will be an eternal reunion in Heaven for all those who believe in Jesus.

The compassion of Christ motivated Him to reach-out and touch the lives of this family, of this town.

The compassion of Christ motivates us to do the same. Exactly how we 'touch' others is for God to decide and for us to discover as we seek Him for direction. Once we know, once we're led, we seize the situation in total dependence upon His power.

There were two crowds that day in Nain:

- One was leaving the city weeping.
- One was entering the city rejoicing.

As Jon Courson puts it, “Either we are traveling with Jesus to the city, or we are traveling without Him to the cemetery.”

We’re traveling with Him to the city whose builder and maker is God. Along the way we can pick-up other travelers as we experience and express the compassion of Christ.

“From now on, we regard no one according to the flesh.”

