

Tim McClung, Compassion
Reading: Psalm 103:1-14

February 28, 2016

The passage that Brandon just read is the foundational point for my thoughts this morning and the Scriptures that I'm going to take out of the Bible to talk about. I'm going to turn over there briefly and just reread that last portion Brandon just read, Psalms 103:11-13: "For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him; For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust." I've been spending some time thinking about the topic of--I guess you call it evangelism and that's probably a pretty good word for it--but how we communicate with one another and especially how we communicate with people who are not in the church currently or are not aware of their need of the Lord. In that time I've been thinking about what are some of the key points that we need to remember when we're thinking about our communication with one another and communication with those outside of the church. This is one of those points; there are many. But this is one of those points and something I want to spend some time talking about this morning. Nothing I'm going to bring up this morning is particularly. . . I don't pretend to be saying anything I think is revolutionary or is unique, but it is things that God wants us to remember and God wants us to understand and for the sake of reminding our minds and reminding our hearts of our relationship with the Lord and our responsibility to God. I want to take some time and go through those things this morning.

So what I want to start with--I want to read four different passages and these are four different examples of God's love. The three things that I want . . . points that I want to talk about this morning are God's examples of compassion. Where does God show compassion for his people? Where does he show compassion in the Bible? And I'm only going to cover four of them, so we're not even going to scratch the surface. I want to use those as the foundation for what I'm going to talk about after that--what are the elements of compassion? What are the parts and pieces that make it what it is, that make it work the way that it does? That's the second thing we're going to talk about, and the third thing we're going to talk about is what compassion does, how it impacts people, what compassion looks like, what compassion doesn't look like, and maybe make some compares and contrasts, so we can get a clear picture of what that word means and what it actually is. So I'm going to read four different passages to start off with and if you want to bookmark one or two or all four of them that would be great. What I'm going to ask for when these are done is just some comments and some thoughts on some important elements of these four examples we're going to look at. So something you see and hear that is significant, something between a relationship or something one of these two people says that really stands out, a significant part of that passage.

We're going to **Luke chapter 15**; this is the parable of the lost son and a lot of us are very familiar with the parable of the lost son, so we'll skip a majority of the passage. I will go directly to the reconciliation of the son with the father. So I'm going to start in

verse 19, Luke 15 verse 19. This is the son speaking as he's decided he's going to return to his father after being away. Luke 15:19: " 'I am no longer worthy to be called your son. Make me like one of your hired servants.' And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, [this is the son coming to his father], his father saw him and had compassion and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight and I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servant, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet,'" so keep that in the back of your mind.

I'd like to go to **Genesis chapter 3**. We're going to talk about Adam and Eve and God's communication with Adam and Eve after they eat of the fruit of the tree of good and evil. This is often not something that I think of as compassionate because it doesn't. . . it's more talking about the consequences of what happens after they eat of the tree, but let's look through it and look for some good examples of things that God does for Adam and Eve after they commit the sin. Starting with verse eight and this is after Adam and Eve have eaten of the tree. "And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. And Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the tree of the garden. Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, 'Where are you?' so we said I heard your voice in the garden. I was afraid and because I was naked and I hid myself." And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree, which I commanded you that you should not eat?" Immediately after that, he talks to Satan directly, talks to Eve directly, and talks to Adam directly about the things that are going to happen or what happens as a result of this sin. But he then makes animal skins for Adam and Eve and clothes them and sends them out of the garden in Genesis chapter 3.

Let's go to **Matthew 18: 27**. This is the parable of Christ talking of the master and servant. Matthew 18--I'll start in verse 25: "But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold with his wife and his children all that he had and a payment to be made. [This is the master talking to the servant]. The servant therefore fell down before him, saying 'Master, have patience with me and I will pay you all.' Then the master of that servant was moved with compassion, released him and forgave the debt." The last one is **Jeremiah chapter 12** starting in verse 14. "Thus says the Lord against all my evil neighbors who have touched the inheritance which I caused my people Israel to inherit: ' Behold, I will pluck them out of the land, and I will pluck them out of the house of Judah from among them. Then it shall be after I have plucked them out, I will return and have compassion on them and bring them back everyone to his heritage and everyone to his land. And it shall be if they will learn carefully the ways of my people and swear by my name, 'as the Lord lives' as they taught my people to swear by Baal, and they shall establish in the midst of my people. But if they do not obey, I will utterly pluck them up and destroy that nation says the Lord."

So now that we've read those four example of compassion, what are some things that stand out, especially themes that you see in our four examples? [writes on board]. **Forgiveness** is one. Another one I'll put up here is **Love**. **Restoration**? Thank you.

Understanding--excellent, that's another good one. **Patience. Assistance** --doing something for you that you can't do for yourself. Any others? Here's one I think is a little different but related, **Remorse**. This is something that we see in all of those, that the person who is receiving compassion, who is on the receiving end of the compassion is expressing remorse in either the remorse is the trigger or remorse is part of what happens in that process of compassion. That person understands that they have made a mistake or they understand that they have fallen short of an expectation and so there is remorse. In the case of Adam and Eve, what did they do after the tree and they hear God is walking in the garden? Yes, they hide. and the reason they hide is they realize they did something wrong. In the case of the master and the servant, the servant realizes that he's done something wrong. He says please give me time to pay this back. I understand that I have wronged you, let me make it right. The servant acts unrighteously right after that but we see an act of remorse taking place in there in that example as well. And obviously the father and the son is the son goes through the effort and realizes that he wants to have restitution and reconciliation with his father. He returns and his father sees his remorse and him coming back and the things that he says and has compassion on him. This is not fundamental to compassion, but I think you see it a lot of times when you have this understanding this restoration take place, so thank you, those are all really good.

I'd like to look at a few verses that pinpoint some of these ideas. Let's go to Micah 7 verse 18: "Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever, because he delights in steadfast love. He will again have compassion on us; he will tread our iniquities underfoot. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will show faithfulness to Jacob and steadfast love to Abraham, as you have sworn to our fathers from the days of old."

In I Corinthians 13 verse 13, Paul talks about faith, hope and love. One of the things that I've been thinking about when we think about talking to people who are outside the church, thinking about having communications with people who don't have a relationship with God, which do you think people have the hardest time really understanding correctly? If you take faith, hope and love, secularly speaking, which one of those three do you think people struggle with the most as far as really having a good understanding of? Love. I would absolutely agree with you because people have faith in something --it may not be directed at the correct thing but they have faith in something. People seek after hope--that's just natural; humans seek for hope in something, but we don't really have a good understanding of what it is to have love. What is interesting about compassion is compassion is a form of the expression of love. We see that here in Micah when it's talking about God talking to his people. Why does he show compassion on his people? He shows compassion because he has love; compassion is an expression of love. It is a true and real action that takes place as a result of love for a person. It is the love of a father for a son; it is the love of God for his people, so compassion is one thing that we can use to show people what true love is, the example of God's love, because one of the great ways that God expresses love is

showing compassion, showing his mercy, by showing his forgiveness. Compassion is an expression of love.

Let's go to Isaiah 54. Starting in verse seven: "For a mere moment, I have forsaken you, but with great miracles, I will gather you. With a little wrath I hid my face from you for a moment. But with everlasting kindness, I will have mercy on you says the Lord your Redeemer. For this is like the waters of Noah to me, for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah would no longer cover the earth, so I have sworn that I would not be angry with you. For the mountains shall depart, the hill shall be removed, but my kindness shall not depart from you nor should my covenant of peace be removed, says the Lord, who has mercy on you." God's mercy endures forever. It is part of who he is because God is love. He has mercy on us. He shows kindness on us and this compassion that he has towards us is an expression of that love.

The second one I want to talk about is understanding, having an understanding for one another. And one of the ways that we do that is we realize the people that we're talking to or interacting with are not so much different from us. If we go to the New Testament and go to I Corinthians 6 verse 11, verse 11 is a great example of remembering that we are not so different from anyone else in this world. I Corinthians 6, starting in verse 9: "Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you, but you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the spirit of our God." Let's go to Luke chapter 10 verse 34. This is the example that we call the Good Samaritan; he was a Samaritan and he helped this man who is on the side of the road. So let's start in verse 30: "Then Jesus answered and said, "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell among thieves who stripped him of his clothes, wounded him and departed, leaving him half dead. By chance a certain priest came down that road and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. Likewise a Levite when he arrived at the place came and looked and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. When he saw him, he had compassion. So he went to him, bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine and set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him." The good Samaritan is a great example of someone who sees a man who is in a difficult situation and has compassion on him. Why is it that these two examples he uses first, the priest and then a Levite don't have compassion on this man on the side of the road, but a Samaritan was culturally speaking would have been considered to be a person of lower esteem, he had compassion on this man. Why was it the Samaritan? Why did Christ word this parable this way, that the Samaritan was the one who did this work? Well, that's because compassion levels everybody out. Compassion is about that we are all on the same level; no one is better than anybody else. No one is worse than anybody else. We are all sinners and we are all working to get through this world and have a relationship with God. That is what it means to understand someone. The Samaritan understood what that man was going through, probably for many different reasons. Probably because maybe he had been in similar situations or he just had compassion

on him because he understood he needed help. The Levite and the priest, the example he uses here, would traditionally at the time be someone who would have been a pious person, would have shown an example of compassion because of their piety, because of their apparent righteousness, but they don't. And the point Christ is trying to make here is that compassion does not come from outward examples of righteousness; it comes from inward purity, it comes from cleansing ourselves in being righteous and being like God because God is the ultimate example of compassion. Being like God, living our lives like God, is what makes us compassionate. Purity is the foundation to having compassion on other people.

Let's go to Philippians 2:3-4. This is another great example why purity is really important for us to be able to express compassion to others. Philippians 2:3-4: "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself, but each of you look not out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. [Verse five]. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted him and given him the name which is above every name." So the first thing that Paul says there is that we should esteem each other better than one another. He gives the example of Christ; Christ is the perfect example of esteeming others better than himself. If we take the example of the Samaritan compared to the Levite, culturally speaking, the Samaritan was of a lower esteem than the Levites were, but the real example, in reality, Christ is always of the higher esteem than us because he's Christ, he's God, he's part of the godhead. But because he loves us so much, because he shows such great compassion that he did not esteem his position, his authority over us as something that he should hold on to, but that he would express his love for us and show his compassion by making himself equal with us and then living a life and dying on the cross so that we can have forgiveness and mercy. That is the definition of compassion. That is better than any definition Webster could come up with. That is the definition of compassion and that is purity; that is love. That is mercy; that is understanding. You know Christ got an understanding of what it was to be human. He got an understanding of what it was to die a painful death, to suffer and fight against Satan, and experience all of those things. He could have compassion on us in a way that no one else ever could.

Let's move on to my last point, and I want to talk about what compassion does and for that purpose I want to talk about just two verses here. First I want to talk about Jeremiah 10 verse 23- 24: "O Lord, I know the way of man is not in himself. It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps. O Lord, correct me, but with justice not in your anger lest you bring me to nothing." Let's go to Hebrews 10:34: I'll start in verse 32. "But recall in the former days in which after you were illuminated. You endured a great struggle with sufferings partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly why you became companions with those who are so treated. For you had compassion on me in my chains and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods,

knowing that you have a better and enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which is a great reward for you have need of endurance so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise." What I want to get from these two passages there is one of the things that compassion does, it helps us understand our relationship with God and our relationship with other people. Part of what compassion is is realizing that we are just like everyone else, what we talked about in I Corinthians. We are struggling with sin and that we are in the hands of God who has every right to display justice towards us but chooses to display mercy and compassion. And we realize our humanity-- that we are not perfect, that we are just like everybody else, that we're all on a level playing field. Having compassion for one another puts us all on the same level and also the other thing it does for us -- it gives us a way to direct our resources and our efforts in a way that is efficient . If we have compassion on other people, we see opportunities to serve just like we see in Hebrews and use the utilities and the things that God has given us to give him glory, but not to seek earthly things, but to seek what? Seek heavenly things, to seek things that are above. We don't use the material possessions we have here to serve our own needs. We use material possessions we have here to serve one another. As we see in Philippians, we esteem others higher than ourselves. We are all equal; we show compassion and love to one another and use the tools that we have to serve one another and through that give glory to God, and that walks us down the road towards a greater relationship with the Lord and as the writer of Hebrews said, eventually a relationship with God in heaven as part of that process of being righteous, of being pure, and of being cleansed.

I think I got all the high points of what I wanted to talk about here, but I've got a couple of minutes left. So the fourth thing that compassion does is it makes us realize our humanity. It changes our priorities, helps us focus on the priorities of God, rather than our own priorities as we saw in Hebrews 10:34. It creates safety and community. Part of what it is to be in a congregation as we saw in the verse in Philippians is that if we esteem each other higher than ourselves, we're able to have trust and have faith in each other and have community safety and confidence in our relationship with each other that we're going to protect each other. We're all going to be okay. If one person runs into a struggle, whatever that might be, that we can help one another. Compassion gives us confidence and community that we are going to be able to take care of each other.

The last thing that compassion does is save souls. When we have an understanding of our own humanity, when we don't think of ourselves as Christians who are not . . . who are different than those other people out in the world, If we show compassion on the people who are around us, people see that.. They see that you don't think that you have everything perfectly figured out, but that you are there to help them. You care about them. It isn't about you-- that it actually is about them. That is very unique. Compassion is something that you are giving to that other person. It is not what you're trying to receive from that communication and relationship. Showing love and showing compassion towards someone is a way of reflecting the love of God. It is a way of reflecting who God is through our actions. When people see that, they react to that

because it is different than what they see in the world. So by keeping ourselves pure, by having a good relationship with the Lord, by serving one another, by focusing our priorities on something that is heavenly, and serving of one another as opposed to serving our own needs, we can show the example of Christ's love through compassion. It is just one part of the love of God. There are myriad, limitless facets of the love of God, but compassion is just one of them and is something that we can use to give glory to God through his service of one another and also those who are outside the church and eventually through the power of God and his love and his mercy help Him find souls that need saving.