



THE FIRST WORD

FROM FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF BONITA SPRINGS

What Compassion!

SERMON BY REV. SU KIM ■ MARCH 16, 2025

Introduction

Today is Compassion Sunday. That's not just because Compassion International is a wonderful ministry. It's not just because our church has a wonderful partnership with Compassion in the Dominican Republic. But this Sunday we highlight Compassion International because compassion is an attribute of Almighty God.

Compassion is to be so moved that we are moved to action. Presbyterians are often referred to as the Frozen Chosen. That is typically because we are often not moved so much that we actually move! Compassion is not just that we experience a deep emotion, but that we experience a deep emotion and are moved to act. And we do so not because we want to be good or helpful people, but because our God is a God of compassion.

From 1958 to 1991, the game show Concentration was broadcast off and on. I'm only old enough to remember Classic Concentration hosted by Alex Trebek. Contestants tried to match tiles, and when they did, the tiles would be removed, revealing a picture underneath.

And like the tiles in the gameshow, Concentration revealed the true picture underneath, we are going to look at four passages of Scripture—the tiles if you will—that reveal a picture underneath of just how compassionate our God is and what the

means for us.

First, let's look at Exodus 34. Verse 6 says, *"The LORD—the LORD is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love and truth."* This is God's great self-revelation of who He is. Note the repetition of "the Lord," which is likely a deliberate repetition that adds an emotional force to the statement. And if you will recall, in chapter 32 of Exodus, we read about the Golden Calf incident. On the heels of that incident, the Lord said of Himself that He is compassionate and gracious. What a merciful response to faithlessness from the people He just delivered from bondage with a mighty hand and outstretched arm. And they worshipped a golden calf saying that it was the god that brought them up from the land of Egypt.

None of us would probably have objected if God decided to destroy them all then and there. Frankly, if that had been us, that's probably what would have happened. But "the Lord the Lord" declares that He is compassionate and gracious. He forgives their iniquities. Not only that, but the Lord appointed Bezalel by name and filled him with the Spirit to lead the work of building the Tabernacle. The tabernacle is constructed just as the Lord commanded and one of the last verses of Exodus says, *"The cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle"* (Exodus 40:34). Almighty God not only forgives faithless people, but He chooses to dwell with them. What compassion! This story reveals a little bit of just how compassionate our God is.

Now let's stay in the Old Testament and look at Jonah 4. Verse 2 says,

He prayed to the Lord, "Please, Lord, isn't this what I said while I was still in my own country?"

That's why I fled toward Tarshish in the first place. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in faithful love, and one who relents from sending disaster."

Jonah was called by the Lord to preach to the great city of Nineveh, but he refused to go because he knew the character of the Lord. What the Lord revealed about Himself way back in Exodus 34 was found to be true through Israel's history, time, and time, and time again. And Jonah says, "I knew! I knew! You were gracious and compassionate!" The Lord was compassionate to His people, time and time again. But the Assyrians, whose capital was Nineveh, were enemies and oppressors of the people of God. And God was going to have compassion on them? Now in chapter 3, it appears they repent, but they didn't make a covenant with God and decide to live for Him, and yet God is compassionate. What compassion! So, this story reveals a little bit more of just how compassionate our God is. Now let's move to the New Testament.

Probably one of the most famous and beloved parables is the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15. Verse 20 says, "*But while the son was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him.*" The younger son completely broke his relationship with his father, ran off, and squandered everything. But when he came to his senses, he decided to go back home and came up with this elaborate speech. But while he was still a long way off, the father was filled with compassion, and he ran to him and welcomed him fully as his son. And the older son, who lived with his father, did not have a relationship with him. You see, proximity does not necessarily mean intimacy. Both sons, who did not want a relationship with their father are invited to the banquet because of their father's compassion and love.

What compassion! This story also reveals a little bit more of just how compassionate our God is. Now let's move on to our final Scripture.

This is our main text for today. Matthew 9:35-38 says,

Jesus continued going around to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness. ³⁶ When he saw the crowds, he felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dejected, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is abundant, but the workers are few. ³⁸ Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest."

When Jesus sees the crowds, He feels compassion for them. Compassion here is a strong verb related to visceral emotions. It's very close to the idiom "a punch to the gut." The context of this passage is Jesus' ministry in what Matthew says was "*all the towns and villages.*" And He has healed every disease and every sickness. But the Bible says that it wasn't necessarily the diseases and the afflictions that caused Jesus to feel compassion but their spiritual state. You see, their spiritual leaders had failed them, so they were like sheep without a shepherd. But Jesus has compassion for them and does something about it. First, He commands His disciples to pray. Really? The answer is prayer? Prayer is faith in action, and it provides the power for the harvest because this is not a normal harvest. There is a Lord of this harvest. And He alone has the sovereign authority over this harvest. And He begins to involve His disciples by having them pray here, sending them in the next chapter.

This is our compassionate God, revealed through just 4 passages of Scripture. And brothers and sisters, if you are a follower

of Christ and saved and born again, it is because of God's compassion. He has shown every single one of us compassion. He saw our spiritual condition; it was like a punch to the gut, and that compassion led Him to do something about it. Namely, He gave up all heavenly glory, He came in the form of man, as an infant born in a humble manger in Bethlehem. He lived the perfect life we could never live. He died a sinner's death that you and I deserved to die. He rose again on the third day, defeating sin and death forever. He poured out His Spirit on us so that we, the ones who have experienced His compassion, may share that compassion with others. Our God of compassion showed us compassion. Our God was so moved that He was moved to action. What compassion!

The text today says that the harvest is plentiful, and laborers are few. That was true then; that is true today. According to the Joshua Project, there are 8.08 billion people, and nearly 42.4% of them are unreached. Our compassionate God commands us to pray and sends us into the harvest. He has sent my family to Bangkok for the plentiful harvest there, and He is sending all of us across the street and around the world to the least, the last, and the lost.

Now if compassion is such an incredible aspect of our God, and we are supposed to become more and more like God by the power of the Holy Spirit, what does that mean for us? If we are shaped by the compassion of God, what will that look like?

First is that we will serve in and through the church. The harvest is plentiful, but laborers are few. As I look around this room, I see so many of you serve with great passion. But I wonder if there might be someone here who has been on the fence. There are so many incredible ministries this church supports that you can get involved with: New Horizons, Meals on

Wheels, Café of Life, Mision Peniel, and others that seek to help those in need. Compassion must move us to action.

Second, forgive quickly. Especially in the first 3 Scriptures today, our compassionate God quickly acts to forgive. Sometimes, it's easy for us to forgive; at other times, we might hold on to grudges or hurts. We might want people to earn their forgiveness. Brothers and sisters, that is entirely unbiblical. Ask the Spirit, "Is there someone I am holding a grudge against that I need to forgive?" As followers of a compassionate God, we must be compassionate and quick to forgive.

A third way is to consider how we view others. Do we view people with disdain, disregard, or even disgust or do we view them with compassion? God viewed the crowds as sheep without a shepherd. The Bible tells us that those who do not know God are spiritually blind and lost. Our God looks at this and is moved to compassion. Do you know someone who is going through something painful? Walk with them through it. That can be hard to do. As people shaped by the compassion of our God, we must refuse to look away from those in need who we have the ability and opportunity to help. Rebecca McLaughlin has written a wonderful book that may help in this regard. In *No Greater Love: A Biblical Vision for Friendship*, we learn how to form life-changing Christ-centered friendships and thrive together. She writes, "When Jesus calls His followers to love each other just like He loves them, He's not just going with the natural grain of friendship. He is calling people who might never have gone near each other into sacrificial-love relationships."

Finally, consider sponsoring a child today through Compassion International. Plenty of information is available for you about the ministry if you are interested. One thing I'd like to

highlight is that Compassion International does not merely give handouts to those in poverty, but they become a family to those in need, most notably through a local church. It is not merely an opportunity to give a little more than \$43 per month, but to become connected to a child and his or her family by communicating, praying, and loving. So much more than a financial investment this is an invitation into deep connection. That is true Biblical compassion. Compassion is a deep, visceral feeling, and it leads us to action. Compassion means we look at the spiritual condition of the crowds and we won't look away.

In 2019, I went on a trip to the Dominican Republic with our amazing director of Missions Trusha Barner and some members of this church. Some of the things we saw were incredibly hard to witness. We had a choice: We could look away or we could choose to see the evil and the suffering in the world and engage. Why? Because that's what God did for each of us. And that is true Godly compassion.

Conclusion

Through four Scriptures today, we've seen how compassionate our God is. What an amazing God we serve. As His people, when others see us with the tiles of our lives removed, what picture do they see? May they see how the Spirit of God empowers us to live as people of compassion and may they say, "What compassion!" ■



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