

The Heart of Christ

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[0 : 00] Let's hear God's word, Matthew chapter 9. And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every affliction.

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few.

Therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. Amen, and may God add his own blessing to this reading of his word.

Alright, we're going to look at this text we just read for a few minutes together. The vow I've made to myself is that I'm not going to look at Derek and Katrina today as much as possible, so they're right here to my left.

Excuse me. On a day like today, Derek's induction as we commissioned Derek and Katrina.

[1 : 12] One of the things you do is you reflect on 22 years of ministry. I know that they are doing that. Many of us are doing that. I think I've done that and I've wondered what is it that made their ministry so fruitful the past 22 years, and I've been around for about 10 of those.

One of the things I think that keeps coming in my mind, and I know I've heard this from others of you, is compassion. That they have so much compassion. They have so much love for people.

That's one of the things. Why do you go plant a new church in such a mature age after 22 years of ministry? You do that because of compassion, because you love people, yeah?

That's them. What do you need to go and plant a church after 22 years of ministry here? What do they need? They need the heart of Christ. We read about that here in Matthew 9, the heart of Christ.

The heart of Christ we learn here in Matthew 9 is the heart of compassion. Derek and Katrina have that. They will leave here leaving their mark on us. That mark I think could largely be summed up as compassion, the compassion of Christ for people, the heart of Christ.

[2 : 25] They've got it. They learned it from Jesus. We all need it, the heart of Christ, the compassion of Jesus. Let's think about it together. What is the compassion of Jesus?

What is really another way to say it is the compassion of God for us? And then secondly, how can we all together with them grow into that and pray for them as we send them today?

So let's think about that for just a minute. What is the compassion of Jesus? First, if you look down with me in this passage at verse 35 and 36, we're told that Jesus went around to all the cities and villages and towns.

And he was teaching, he was preaching, he was healing people's diseases. That's what it says in verse 35. And then in verse 36 it says, wherever he went, when he would see the crowds, he would feel compassion for them.

And this is a unique word. It's not a word that shows up at all in classical Greek text. This is written in a different version of Greek and we don't see it anywhere else. It's not common. And when you look at this word, compassion, that's used here and get to the bottom of it, it's actually a word that means guts.

[3 : 34] So it very literally says here that he had a gut level emotion. It's the word entrails in the Greek that's speaking here about his compassion. When you see the Greeks in general talk about emotion, they oftentimes will refer to the guts.

You know, a person has a gut level emotion, but when the Greeks do it, it's always referencing, almost always anger. But when the Bible does it, when Jesus does it, it uses entrails, that gut level emotion to talk about not anger, but compassion, a very specific type of love.

And that's what we have here. Jesus has this gut level emotion for people. It's love and it's pain, actually, at the very same time. And let me just mention three things I think we see here about Jesus' compassion. What is it?

The first thing is that Jesus' compassion means, I think, that he longs for us, that he wants to attach himself to us. I think that's what we see here first.

Compassion, the word here really means just to give yourself away to somebody and to attach yourself to somebody. The compassion of God is all over the Old Testament.

[4 : 45] And when you read the phrases in the Old Testament about the compassion of God, it's got this sense that God does not need anybody. Yeah? God is a, he's blessed in himself.

He is the fountainhead of all goodness. He doesn't need anybody. He doesn't need us. And yet, all throughout the Bible, all throughout the Old Testament, it speaks of the compassion of God. And it means that right at the point where God does not need us, he wants to be near us.

He wants to attach himself to us. It's entirely voluntary. And right here, even though God is invisible to us today, it's saying that in the middle of history, the compassion of God is seen most visibly when Jesus comes and wants to attach himself to people.

Now, he wanted to do that so much that he became human. That's how much he longs for us. That's how much he wants to be near us. The first one, the second thing we see here is that the compassion of Jesus is that he longs for us to attach himself to us in a way that we don't deserve.

And you get that in verse 36 when it says that he looks out at the crowds and he sees that they are, quote, sheep, harassed and helpless.

[5 : 56] So he looks out at people and it says that he sees sheep. And the mark of the sheep that he sees is that very literally harassed means they're flipped over. That's the idea of the word. So they're upside down. They can't kick back on their feet properly.

They're torn up is what helpless means. He says they're sheep without a shepherd. They're torn apart. They're upside down. They're bent and broken and they can't fix themselves. Now, B.B. Warfield, the great Princeton theologian, he wrote an essay about this in the 19th century called The Emotional Life of Our Lord, Jesus Christ.

It's a great little essay. You can pick it up online for free. And he says that when you look at the Gospels, the emotion that is most common to Jesus and all the Gospels is compassion more than anything else.

And then he says, well, what exactly is that? When does Jesus show compassion? And Warfield points out that you see it mentioned all throughout the Gospels. And very commonly, Jesus will come to a person that's blind and it'll say he felt compassion for them because of their physical struggle.

Or he'll come to a woman who's about to lose her only child. And it says that he felt deep compassion, pain and love for that loss. But Warfield notes, Jesus does not just feel compassion in the Gospels for physical ailments and problems for people suffering from the pains and miseries of this life.

[7 : 23] And he does. But that when it comes to this moment, we learn that Jesus' compassion is actually also directed straight at our spiritual problem.

That he's got compassion for people who are turned upside down and helpless and it's their own fault. They were made for God and they've run away from God. They're full of sin as the Bible teaches us that word. They're running away.

They don't want to be helped. They're sheep and they're running and they're lost and they can't help themselves. And we learn here that Jesus' compassion is not just that he looks out at the world and says, I'm pained for the way they're pained.

I suffer with them because they're physically suffering and there's disease and death and disaster all around. No, it's even that he comes and has deep, deep love, the emotion of love for us and wants to attach himself to us right at the point of our spiritual helplessness.

That we don't deserve it yet he comes and wants to and longs to. He wants to help. He wants to restore. And that leads us finally to the third thing, the final thing. And that's that the compassion of Jesus is not just that he longs for us, not just that he wants to attach himself to us.

[8 : 39] Not just that he wants to do it right at the place where we don't deserve it, but that he actually wants to do it so that he can forgive us. That's what we see here. That's what he says. He says that I see sheep and they're flipped upside down. They've got a deep spiritual problem.

But he says I long to be their shepherd. You can think of Psalm 23. He's saying, you know, I want to take them to the still waters and give them something to drink that will really last.

I want to lead them to the green pasture. I want to take people who have rebelled against me and bring them back to restoration to forgiveness. Now, my favorite place in the whole Bible to think about this, one of the best illustrations, it's great when the Bible provides the illustrations.

So you don't have to think of any is the book of Jonah, that great story where God calls the prophet Jonah to go to Nineveh. And the Ninevites were terrible folks. If you read about the history of the Ninevites, they did a lot of bad.

And friends, have you made mistakes in your life? Have you sinned? Have you struggled? Have you made bad decisions? Have your thought life? Look, let me tell you, the Ninevites, it was worse. And God says to Jonah, God says to Jonah, I want you to go and tell them if they will ask for forgiveness, if they will turn their hearts around, if they were pent, I'll forgive them, I'll restore them. And Jonah refuses to go. He runs away.

[10 : 07] He doesn't want anything to do with it. And at the end of the book, there's a bit of comedy. And I won't be able to sell it, you know, because I'm not good at that. But there's a bit of comedy. And it's when Jonah says, you know, God, I didn't go to Nineveh because I know how compassionate you are.

That's what he said. Remember, he says, I didn't want to go because I know you and you're compassionate and gracious and slow to anger and abounding in love. And you love to forgive. And I knew that if you, if I went, you would actually show compassion to them. You would actually forgive them.

You would pour your heart out to these people, these Ninevites that don't deserve it. And you see, this is the heart of God. The compassion of God for you today, friends, is that Jesus Christ came into the world because he wants to forgive. He wants to restore.

He wants to attach himself to you forever. That's why he became a human being. There's this moment in the Old Testament as well. One of my favorite verses as well. In Isaiah 49, that really gets us across. God says in Isaiah 49 to the people, does a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child that she is born?

Of course, the answer is no, of course not. A mother does not forget the little one that she has given birth to. And he says, though she may forget, I will never forget you. God says, that's like me. I would never forget you. You are a precious child to me. I want you. I want to attach myself to you.

[11 : 37] And so he did in the incarnation in the coming of Jesus Christ. Look, let me, let me move on, but I'll say this. This today for every single person here is the heart of God. Jesus Christ wants to attach himself. He wants to be close to you.

And he did that. We know that's so true because he became a human being and he will be a human being forever. Because he wants to be near to us. You know, God became a wiggly little baby because he wants to draw close to you. That's his compassion for you.

And his compassion for you is not that only that he wants to be close to you, but that he longs to come close to you when you don't deserve it. Exactly when you don't deserve it. And so he looked out at all of us and he saw sheep helpless. And he said, that's the people I want to come for.

Not the righteous, not the perfect, but the sinner. That's the people that he wants to come for, that he longs to save. And his compassion goes so far. He attaches himself to us forever by becoming human. He comes as a shepherd to help with sheep.

And it went so far that when he looked out and saw helpless sheep, he said, not just that he would have compassion, not just that he would feel an empathy or misery, but that he would taste it.

[12 : 56] You know, it's not just that he looked out and he saw sheep. It's that he looked out and decided, I will become the lamb led to the slaughter. He went all the way to the point of death. He went all the way to the point of not just feeling our misery, but becoming our misery.

Becoming our sin. Taking it on in himself. Dying the death that we deserved. He went that far. That's the compassion of the living God for you today. And he longs to save. He longs to restore. He longs to forgive and give you the justice that he bought.

God is for you and he wants you and he wants to forgive you. He longs for that. That's his love for you. Now, Derek and Katrina, they've experienced that gospel. That's the good news. And they know it. They've tasted it. They felt it.

And that is what has led them to the compassion they have for other people. And so secondly and briefly, let me just ask, how do we all today grow in the same compassion, the compassion of Jesus?

If you're a Christian today, or right now, if you're longing to receive that gospel, that good news, that forgiveness, then by God's grace, God then turns around and says, if you believe that you are such an object of God's compassion and you are, then turn around and put on that very compassion.

[14 : 21] Take upon your own heart, that heart, the heart of Christ. How can you do it? How have Derek and Katrina done it and how will they continue to grow in it as they plant hope church leaf?

Let me give you four quick ways right here in the passage. The first is this. We've got to all learn to love cities like Jesus did.

You see, at the beginning of the passage, Jesus went around city to city, town to town, village to village, and he saw people and he loved them. He wanted to attach himself to them. Derek and Katrina have had that heart for a long time for Edinburgh.

What is it that sends you to go plan a church in a neighborhood like Leith after such a fruitful, long ministry? What is that? It's that they love the city like Jesus did. They go out and they love seeing people.

Leith is the most densely populated neighborhood in all of Scotland, in fact. That's got more of the image of God per square inch than anywhere else in the whole of the country. That's the heart we need, the heart of Jesus, to love the city, to love people, to love seeing people, the image of God and long for them like Jesus did.

[15 : 37] The second thing we learn here is that we've also got to have a heart like Christ to be quick to forgive like Jesus was. Jesus came to rescue lost sheep. That's what he says here.

Remember that when he was entering Jerusalem at the end of his life, it says that he looked up and he saw the people and in compassion he wept for them. He said, I long to gather you. But what did they do? They killed him.

Acts chapter 2 says that for every single one of us human beings, we put him on the cross. Our sin put him there. And you see, we all in our lives, we need to repent, we need to ask for forgiveness. We long for people around us to repent, ask for forgiveness.

But we do need to remember Jesus Christ came and died for people that put him on the cross long before they ever asked for forgiveness.

He came to save long before we ever repented. And that's the heart of Christ to be quick to forgive like Jesus is. Not to hold grudges. A person that's quick to forgive and I've learned this so much from Derek and Katrina.

[16 : 49] They're able to take a lot and let things go. And that's the heart of Christ to be quick to dole out forgiveness. Third, afford. That means that all of us, we all have to grow and they will, they are too as they go to leaf and being quick to attach to people.

Now, is that not one of the marks that they're going to leave here? They learned it from Jesus to be quick to attach yourself to other people. And to, you know, what's compassion? It is just to enter somebody's life and to love them to the bottom.

And that's what they've done here. They learned it from Christ and that's what we all desperately need for one another. It's to long to attach ourselves to people to care. Sometimes that does mean actually confronting people, confronting each other in love about sin.

It can mean that. Saying, look, this is a sheep move that you're making right now. Don't do that. Sometimes it's that, but it's walking alongside somebody and saying, I want to weep with you and mourn with you all the way to the end of this thing.

They've attached themselves to people. Jesus attached himself to us. He became human. That's the heart of Christ. That's what we need. And then finally, Jesus tells us exactly what we can all do today. If nothing else, at the very end of this passage in verse 38, Jesus says, the harvest is plentiful. He changes metaphors from sheep to the harvest. And he says, but labors are few.

[18 : 19] So today, friends, Jesus gives you a precise command. Exactly what you can do on this induction Sunday. He says, pray for the labors. Pray. Pray for those that God sends out to do the work of gathering and showing compassion to the people that Jesus longs for.

Pray for Derek and Katrina today. Pray for them. Pray for yourself. Pray for all of us. If you're a believer today, God has called you out to be a labor in the harvest. And so pray, pray for them.

Pray for all of us. Pray for saints. Pray for Hope Church as God commissions all of us Christians to go out into the city and to show compassion on the people that God has.

And God longs to show compassion to in Christ. Let's pray now. Lord, we pray. We pray, oh God, for the labors of the harvest.

And we pray for Derek. We pray for Katrina. As we send them today, God, would you go with them and before them and help them to always remember that you have sent them.

[19 : 26] They're commissioned by the King. And that that means that you have people in the city that you are gathering and you have people in the leaf that you are gathering.

Lord, call those people and use them as your instruments. Lord, we pray for them and lift them before you and long for their good. And we long today in our lives and their lives to know your compassion for us. I pray, Lord, for somebody here, perhaps, that is just today realizing the compassion of Jesus Christ.

And we know that as modern people, we think sometimes you're not very compassionate. We think of the God of the Bible as being a God that as modern people say, maybe doesn't have enough compassion.

Oh, boy, Lord, the Bible says you are so full of compassion. Jonah knew it. So help us, Lord, now to really be awake to how much you love us and long for us and want to restore us, want to forgive us.

Lift up our eyes that we would look at the cross this morning and see the truth of that reality. And so we pray all these things, Lord, in Jesus' name. Amen.