



Reeks: Through the Eyes of Christ

Titel: ... Compassion

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Datum: 10 March 2013

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Friends in Christ, thank you so much for the invitation to be with you, and thank you for the welcome this morning. It's really wonderful to be with you. I also put in that little note that I was born in the North of Ireland, and I was thinking this week about a friend of mine from the South of Ireland. You know in the South they speak with a very, very strong Irish accent. And this guy went to work as a missionary in Zululand for a few years. One day the Bishop said to him, Bill, why don't you try preaching in Afrikaans? And Bill looked a bit puzzled, and he said, why would I do that? So Bishop Zulu said to him, well, you murder Zulu every Sunday, so maybe you should try murdering Afrikaans as well, which is really by way of an apology. My Afrikaans lives in a box that is marked, strictly for emergency use only, and I know it's shameful, after 30 odd years of ministry in this country, that I can't preach to you in Afrikaans, and I can only ask your forgiveness for that. But I wouldn't try; I would only insult you, so please excuse me if I don't do that. Now, where is that clock? Oh, right.

Where I want to begin, when I saw this theme of looking through the eyes of Jesus, it took me back to something which has been a profound inspiration for me, which is to try and look through the eyes of Jesus at people in need, because the New Testament speaks about Jesus constantly having compassion on other people. And when you explore that theme it's much more powerful than you might imagine. You see, over the centuries different cultures have imagined that human emotions arise in different parts of our bodies. If you talk to bright, young, scientifically educated people today and you ask them, where love or anger or fear comes from in my body, they'll talk to you about which part of the brain emotions originate in.

But of course, people didn't always understand about that, so some cultures, and most of us have inherited this, think that emotions come from the heart. That's why on Valentine's Day you send cards with those little pink stylised hearts on them, not usually the rather messy red blood thing that pumps away

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in your chest, you know. Your girlfriend would be a bit upset about that. But I don't know why. Maybe it's because when the tsotsi's come you get palpitations in your chest. Fear makes your heart race, and so maybe we thought that's where it... I always think when my wife first met me, you know, it must have been like that for her. Her heart just started pumping extra, you know.

But not all cultures have thought like that. You'll notice the Americans have coined these words about a gut reaction. And they, when they say that, are going back to very ancient thinking, because in the time of Jesus people believed that our emotions came from here, not from our chests, from our stomachs, from our guts, from this deep place inside where we react to things. So much so that in the Greek language of the New Testament, and I'm not a great expert on that stuff, but I do know this bit, the word for having compassion is based on the word for your guts. Guts in Greek are *splanchna*. A lovely strong word, isn't it? And they made a verb out of that, an action word, so that when the New Testament describes Jesus as having compassion it used the word *splanchnatzomi* [?], which means to have a deep gut reaction of concern. It comes from here. So yes, Jesus is sensitive, always, but He's not soft. He comes with a deeply felt, personal anguish over situations that He meets.

Now, that's the first thing. The second thing is that when you read the Gospels this is one of the most common characteristic things that is said about Jesus. Either the word is there or the reality is there. Jesus is constantly reacting out of deep, deep gut concern towards the people He meets. And if you're a Jesus admirer that's a really important thing to learn and understand about our Lord, because He asks us to be like Him, and because Jesus reveals God to us, and if Jesus is like that then God is like that. God reacts deeply, passionately, when He sees people in need.

Now, the passages that you have on your little slip; we don't have time through them all in great detail, but let me touch a little of this. We start with the Gospel of Luke chapter seven, and I'll give you just some examples of the compassion of Jesus. Luke 7:11, Jesus went to a town called Nain, accompanied by His disciples and a large crowd. As He approached the gate of the town he met a funeral. The dead man was the only son of his widowed mother, and many of the townspeople were there with her. When the Lord

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saw her his heart went out to her. That's a translation. The Greek doesn't mention hearts at all. It mentions guts. His heart went out to her, and He said, don't weep. And He stepped forward and laid His hand on the bier, and the bearers halted in the middle of the funeral procession. And then He said, young man, get up, and he sat up and began to speak.

Now, Nain, as you may know, is a little village across the valley from Nazareth. Nazareth is up on a hillside, and you look down into the valley, and Nain is on the other side and not very far away, so it's quite possible that Jesus knew the village, and even knew this family. What is interesting here is, Jesus walks into the middle of this tragedy, this funeral procession that is marching through the village, and it's a very African scene this, you must understand. Luke underlines this.

People always say: why do the poor have so many children? Well, it's because if there is no other social security your children have to look after you in old age, so you make sure you've got enough of them to look after you. It's what happens. And Luke underlines that the boy who has died is the last son of a woman who has lost her husband. In other words, this, of course it's an emotional tragedy, but it's also a complete catastrophe for that family. Luke is telling us she's got nothing left, no one to depend on. Her entire life has now collapsed. You see the tragedy. And it does not say that Jesus' heart went out to the dead boy, as you might think it would. It says His heart went out to her, because He tuned into the whole catastrophe that was happening to her, and that's why He intervened and made a difference.

If you look at the passage that we read earlier on, now, this is very important. Let me tell you why it's important. If you've been around for a while you'll know that in the churches in South Africa, for the last 20, 30 years, we've been having a debate, and it was very intense, 20, 25 years ago, about what is the Gospel. Is the Gospel about people's souls, about forgiveness, and relationship with God, and going to church, and eternal life, and what happens after your funeral? Or is it about the present? Is it about the poor? Is it about the needy? Is it about oppression and social circumstances which cause people to suffer? And we had a very sharp disagreement between those who wanted to focus over here with people's souls, and those who wanted to focus



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over here with people's bodies and their villages and their homes, and all what seems to be, quote, political stuff.

Now, look at this passage. When Jesus came ashore and saw a large crowd His heart went out to them. I love the translation we read. His heart broke, although actually it doesn't talk about His heart at all, but you know, it's English. Sorry about English. His heart went out them. Why? Because they were like sheep without a shepherd. They needed guidance and direction and understanding and meaning in their lives. It was all about what you might call spiritual stuff that made Jesus react with compassion towards them, and He began to teach them, because teaching was the answer to the needs that they had in their minds, in their spirits, in their souls.

But guess what. A few minutes later He's feeding them, because they are hungry. This story is about both, and not either or. When Jesus is concerned for us He doesn't ask what is happening with our souls or our bodies. He is asking what's happening to us as people, all of us, so He asks us; when we look at other people, to be asking what's happening with all of them, all their lives, their bodies, their minds, their souls, people as human beings. Or you'll see much the same if you look at Mark 8 and the 4,000. We won't stop there, just for now.

It's very good practice for Christians to read their bibles on Sundays, so maybe you can go and read from the notes later in the day and unpack a little more what I'm saying. Let's just look at Mark 9:17. A man in the crowd spoke up. Teacher, I brought my son for you to cure. He's possessed by a spirit that makes him dumb. And then it goes on, in verse 22: these spirits often try to destroy him by throwing him into the fire or into the water, but if it's at all possible for You, take pity on us and help us. There it is. Have compassion on us. It's the same Greek word. Help us. You see how they perceived Jesus as a person who was like that and would do that kind of thing for people? And Jesus said, if it's possible. Everything's possible to one who believes. And the boy's father cried out, I believe. Help my unbelief.

Now, here's a fascinating thing. If you go right back to Mark chapter one, and verse 40, this is the first time this powerful word comes in Mark's Gospel, it

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says that Jesus was approached by a leper who knelt before Him and begged for help, and the man said, if You want to You can make me clean. And Jesus was moved and stretched out His hand and said, I will, be clean. Now, my translation here says Jesus was moved to anger. That's funny. Your Bible in your hand possibly says was moved with compassion. Why? Because, as you know, the Bible didn't fall from heaven readymade. It came through manuscripts that people wrote and copied by hand and passed on from generation to generation.

And because they were human they sometimes made mistakes when they copied them, and so the next generation of scribes and monks and people would look at what they received and either copy it correctly, or copy it and make a mistake, or sit there and say, that's funny. It looks like the last chap may have made a mistake. So we've got, in the great libraries in Europe where these old, old, originals are, there are some which in this verse say Jesus had compassion, and others that have another word, a different word, that says Jesus was angered by what He saw.

Now, it's possible that a scribe thought, oh, compassion is a funny thing. I'll put anger in here instead, but it's more likely that a scribe found the thing, Jesus was angry, and he thought, oh, no, no, no, no, no, no, we can't take think of Jesus being irritated and impatient. We'd better put it in line with the other parts of the Bible which say that Jesus had compassion. Now, we don't know. The scholars write buckets of ink about this stuff, but generally the principle is that whichever is the more unlikely version is probably the original one, because it's more likely they polished something funny than that they did it the other way round. Are you with me? So it's very likely that what Mark originally wrote was that Jesus was angry when He saw this thing happening.

And you say, what's that about? You know what that's about. You read this week that a girl has her throat cut here in Mohlakeng, in the township not far from here. How did you feel? You felt sad, you felt distressed, and you felt angry. Why? Because those emotions are actually much closer together than we often think, obviously, because if you see somebody suffering and you feel compassion for them, you're concerned for them, you will simultaneously be indignant at whatever is causing them to suffer, especially if it's a person,



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won't you? Somebody gets attacked here at the robots, and you're concerned for the person and angry at the person who attacked them.

So you see, God too is both moved with concern and distressed at the things which cause people to suffer. It goes together. Compassion and indignation are two sides of the same coin. So, when we look further in the New Testament we see that Jesus not only expressed this concern, but when you look at His teaching He also talks about it. Jesus was the master storyteller, you know that. And I've given you, on the little sheet, you'll have to read the stories later, but I've given you three of the stories of Jesus in which this very same word, this word for gut reaction of compassion, appears on the lips of Jesus Himself. He uses it in three of His most powerful stories in which He is both teaching us what God is like and teaching us how we should live.

Here they are. The one that we often call the Prodigal Son, you know the story of the father who had two boys, and one of them took all the money and went away and wasted it. And then one day he woke up and he came home again. You know the story very well. You've been reading it since you were knee high to a grasshopper in Sunday school. And what it says in the story is that when the father saw the boy coming he had a gut reaction of love towards him, standing there on the stoep, waiting for the boy to come. And he ran, puffing and panting, you know, like all us old guys, down the driveway to embrace his son, the most wonderful picture in the New Testament. And we all know, Jesus is saying to us, God's like that when you come home. And he also says to us, you better be like that towards other people who need to be reconciled to you.

Then there's the story, I'll take the third one next, the one on your sheet, where Jesus talks about a king who is owed an enormous amount of money by one of his slaves. And the slave comes to him and he says, guess what, have compassion on me and please release my debt. So the king, who's a generous chap, does that. It's strange actually, because most rulers and kings and presidents and people are not like that, but this one was. He was a nice guy. But the slave who was owed a piddly couple of rand by somebody else promptly went out and nearly murdered the other guy to get his two rand back. And guess what? The king was not too pleased, because he had failed

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to pass on the very compassion that he himself had received. And again Jesus is saying, I'm teaching you what God is like, and I'm teaching you what you should be like.

The last one is the famous story in Luke chapter ten, which we normally call The Good Samaritan, but, although that's correct Biblical language it puts it rather culturally at arm's length, doesn't it? What it's really about, it's this story about the guy who gets attached at the robots and hijacked, taken out of his car, beaten to death, left at the side of the road. And the way Jesus tells it, all the Christians come flying past and they don't take their foot off the gas at all, because they're scared of getting involved.

But then he says that this Mozambican who comes down the road, and he has compassion on the guy lying at the side of the road. So what does he do? He stops his taxi. He gets out. He puts himself at risk, because this might be an ambush. He crosses the road. He gets right close to where the need is. He gets right involved. He uses his own resources to patch him up, pick him up, put him on his taxi, take him to the hospital, and then commits himself long term by saying to the guys at the hospital, if it costs any more, talk to me next time I come, and I'll pay the bill for him. And Jesus says, that's what God is like towards you, and that is what you are supposed to be like towards others.

JG Kom ons bid saam. Hemelse Vader, ons sê vir U baie dankie dat ons vanmôre so kan saam wees, en ons dank U vir U woord wat lewe gee, wat 'n lig is vir ons pad, wat ons oë oopmaak om te kan sien. Ons dank U vanmôre vir die liefde wat U vir ons het, vir daardie kompassie, daardie innerlike meegevoel waarmee U loop en waarmee U na ons kyk. Dankie.

Dankie vir die ervaring, vir die agterkom, dat dit is wie U is en dit is hoe U voel, en dit is waarvandaan af U optree, en dit is hoe ons kan verstaan wat U doen. Ons sê vir U baie dankie daarvoor. En ons hoor ook U uitnodiging na so 'n lewe toe. Help ons om te glo dat dit is regtig beter om so te leef as wat dit is om ongevoelig te wees, as wat dit is om met haat te leef, as wat dit is om met onvergewensgesindheid te leef. Ons dank U daarvoor vanmôre, en help ons om in hierdie lewe in te gaan, in die Naam van Jesus, amen.



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Die genade van die Here Jesus, die liefde van die Vader, en die gemeenskap van die Heilige Gees wees en bly met elkeen van julle in hierdie week, amen.