

Lesson 24 Matthew 15. 32(32) Jesus teaches "Compassion"

Mother Teresa

This lesson is better caught than taught. The deep compassion of Mother Teresa touched a myriad lives in Calcutta and became legendary in her lifetime. Her life-style was modelled on Jesus.

A Professor leads communion

Back in the 1962 Professor Steele led a communion service at the then Magee Theological College for the undergraduates. He split the word "compassion" into its two Latin roots, "Cum" and "Passio" which taken together mean, "I suffer with". He then depicted the cross as the identification of Christ with our sin and need and hurt and pain. The cross is thus definitive of compassion. A most telling and memorable lesson!

Among the best stories ever told

The story of the Good Samaritan takes the idea of "compassion" and places it firmly on the highways and bye-ways of life. Here a figure so different from the religious priest or Levite comes upon the half-dead victim of bandits on the notorious Jericho Road and reaches out in sympathy careless of self and safety, priorities and penny minding. Wounds are treated with vinegar wine and oil and bound. The man walks beside the stranger whom he treats as a friend to an inn where he secures a period of recuperative help. Even then he promises to return-for "compassion" like its sister virtue "love" never fails. This story with a historical base *becomes a parable* when we see it in terms of Jesus. He is the Stranger who draws a circle to include the outcast. It is He who poured out his life-blood for our redemption and of His Spirit to renew our dying hope in life. He it is who introduces us to others who are charged to care as He would and best of all He will return and complete His work in our lives.

Compassion in Jesus Ministry

Matthew picks up strongly on the Master's compassion. In Matthew 9.36 He looked on crowds of people and saw how harassed and helpless they were, and how lost without a shepherd. He took immediate measure to remedy that sending out the twelve to meet huge need. Here is *the compassion that leads the wanderer home*. Then in Matthew 14.14 we have the classic "holiday interruption" that we associate with national need and premiers today. Jesus interrupted His time set aside for rest He spent time with them and healed their sick ones and then as evening approached He created a miraculous meal feeding 5000 men and family members too highlighting for all time the sharing heart of a boy who gave his lunch to help. This boy was learning to care and feel compassion no doubt from watching the earlier loving kindness of Christ among the people. This variety of *compassion puts sickness before rest and lives flexible*. The third story of the King's debtor who was forgiven 10,000 talent debt only to punish a humble servant of his who could not repay 100 days of debt. In this third story Christ teaches *the compassion that forgives*

Compassion in Matthew 15.32

The crowds had climbed a mountain -even those disabled in walking, those who had permanent limps and visually handicapped persons were there-even some who had never spoken in their lives. These people stayed 3 days on the mountain with Jesus. There were 4000 men and many women and children too. Jesus called the 12 who were mingling as they ought and stated his feeling. "I am moved in my very inner being for this leaderless throng. They have remained with me three days (24+to 48 hours) and have nothing with them to eat. Jesus added, "I am not inclined to let them go without eating lest they should die on the way. The word *εκλυα*(Greek original) is used by Hippocrates the famous physician in this sense. Jesus' compassion can be viewed remarkably clear through His use of another word the word which is translated "loose" in "loosing the crowd" *απολυα*(Original) This term speaks of His disinclination to end a fellowship so sweet and an attendance of servants so loyal by sending some of them to their death by dehydration etc.

It is in those expressions of care we cannot prevent speaking about-those inclinations that will stand in the way of allowing things to take another course that compassion is most familiarly seen and most wonderfully emphatic in the life of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Compassion

Two illustrations suffice to recap on this noble theme. One comes from Africa where Albert Schweitzer, then a man of 85, was walking uphill with friends under the equatorial sun. He suddenly pulled away and shouldered the armload of wood that a woman was carrying. When he rejoined them at the hilltop his friends craved a reason why at his age he dared attempt such a thing. His reply, "No one should ever have to carry a burden like that alone"

The other is the familiar children's tale of a house fire and a boy hanging out the window yelling amid crackling flames-all along the front of the house. A stranger ran round the back -shinned up a boiling hot drainpipe and down again with the newly orphaned boy clinging to his neck. Shortly afterwards ad hoc arrangements for the child's care

were attempted through a public hearing in the town hall. A farmer a teacher and a man of some wealth stated their grounds for guardianship. Presently the stranger slipped in the back of the hall and then walked up front removing his hands from his pockets. The boy leapt into his arms, clinging to the man in pure joy. The matter was decided with very general consent. The marred hands spoke of a deeply compassionate heart and like the Samaritan this stranger had come back to complete the work he had begun.



From paper to practice

What is the root meaning of compassion?

Can you remember one good story Jesus told on the subject?

Did the Lord just talk about His feelings armchair style? eg. "Isn't it awful that so many people go to bed hungry. Shouldn't the government do something about it?"

Should we dare alter peoples' lives ? Best leave them alone with their native customs? On what authority do we go into the world to make a difference?