



- Video – Get Service
- The Big Idea: To live like Christ, we must put compassion into action.
- Read Luke 7:11-17
- Pray

We can rely on the radical redemption of Jesus Christ. That was, you may recall, the final point that we made last week, and it was taken in part from these verses that we shall examine again in greater depth today, for there can be no doubt that in this passage we see a radical redemption indeed.

In this passage nothing less than the incomparable power of Jesus Christ is revealed. It is one of the three great instances in the New Testament where we read about Jesus raising a dead person to life. Along with the resurrection of Lazarus and that of Jairus' daughter, this event about which we have read today is rightly regarded as one of the greatest miracles Jesus ever performed on earth. As theologian J.C. Ryle has noted, "In all three cases we see divine power displayed. In each we see evidence that the Prince of Peace is stronger than the king of terrors and that though death, the last enemy, is mighty, he is not so mighty as the sinners' friend."

In our text today, we are blessed to see yet another remarkable aspect of the unmitigated and unparalleled rule of Jesus Christ. We see that His great power is poured forth on account of His great compassion. From this example, we ought to learn that God will be glorified in us when, like Christ, we put our compassion into action. In order for us to put Christlike compassion into action, there are at least five characteristics of His compassion revealed in our text for today that we ought to exemplify, the first of which is this: To exemplify the compassion of Christ, we must...

- 1.) Be observant.

In full disclosure, I must confess that I am not always the most observant person in the world (especially when football is on). I have been known to scamper through the house hollering, “Stephanie! Where are my keys!” only to hear her respond, “You mean small metal things in your hand?” Or I might ask, “Sweetheart, what shall we do about supper tonight?” only to hear her answer, “I just finished telling you that I am making some barbecue chicken! Don’t you smell it?” “Oh...yeah...huh?” I might reply.

You know, sometimes I think that most of us can be like that about other people. We see them every day, and every day they appear before us with tremendous needs. Yet we scurry on, unaffected by their plight and unaware of the opportunities for ministry with which God surrounds us each day. That was certainly the case for the fellow in the video, wasn’t it? The man in it was so caught up in himself that he not only didn’t notice the needs of the people around him, but he didn’t even care.

Sadly, I think that sort of oblivion toward the events around us seems to be a growing plague in our culture. For example, nowadays, when walking through Wal-Mart or through the mall in Evansville, rather than friendly smiles and warm greetings, we tend to encounter more and more people who are largely, if not totally oblivious to others.

You see them all the time. You see them in the form of teenagers with the music devices in their pockets and headphones on their ears. Let me ask you, especially you younger people, how on earth are you going to be observant about the world around you if your hearing is constantly plugged up with i-tunes? But it is not just these teenagers we encounter; we see them in the form of people who seem to be addicted to their cell phones, lost in a thousand private conversations that separate them from the events unfolding right in front of them. We see them in the form of people who are constantly in a hurry, rushing from one place to another with no time to spare for other people. (Sometimes that person is me.)

However, in our text this morning, we see something quite different—quite superior—in the example of our Lord. And in Him, we see a compassion that is first of all observant. Please look with me at verses 11-13, and notice here Jesus’ acute awareness of what was happening all around Him:

“Soon afterward, Jesus went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went along with him. As he approached the town gate, a dead person

was being carried out—the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, ‘Don't cry.’”

We especially recognize Christ's observant compassion in the first few words of verse 13. You see, not only was Jesus well aware of the events unfolding around Him, but so great was His awareness of them that, as the text informs us, his heart went out to the widow He saw. Not only did Jesus notice what was going on around Him, but He was so aware of His surroundings that He was deeply moved by them. Thus, the first thing we observe in this text that Jesus was able to put His compassion into action because His compassion was observant.

However, more than just being observant, the compassion we see in Christ is observant in a very particular way, a way in which our compassion should also be observant. From this passage we learn that if our compassion is to resemble that of our Lord's, then we must...

2.) Be others-focused.

More than just being alert to the events around Him, Jesus was especially attentive to the *people* around Him. Not only that, but He clearly cared very intensely about the people He perceived. Not only our Lord notice the people passing by, but He considered them deeply enough to see what they were seeing and to feel what they felt. In verse 13, Luke writes, *“When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her...”* When was the last time that our hearts went out to someone in need?

This really isn't as easy as it might sound, because adopting this others-focused mentality of Christ can be quite a challenge in our culture. We seem to live in a time where the world around us tells us that the greatest good is to do whatever works in your life and feels best to you at the time. We live in a day where we are daily encouraged to concentrate on our own needs and our own desires. Because of that, we often adopt a self-centered mentality that says, “If there is going to be any compassion passed around today, then it had better be other people expressing compassion to me, because I deserve it!” But that must not be the mentality for those of us who have been redeemed by the kindness and compassion of Christ. Rather, we must be devoted to doing our best to emulate the compassion of Christ, and if we are going to do that, then we must maintain an others-focused mentality.

If we will look at the events of our text through the others-focused eyes of Christ, I believe we will see what He saw, and I pray that our hearts will go out just as did His. First of all, we should notice that, although what was passing in front of Jesus was a funeral procession, what He chiefly saw was a mother in great pain and with great needs. Jesus looked deeper than the situation and became heartbroken for an individual who found herself in the midst of monumental misfortune. Notice carefully, that in verse 14, Luke does not tell us that Jesus' heart went out when He saw the funeral, but rather that His heartfelt compassion was kindled when He saw the widow.

And what did He see? He saw the epitome of tragedy. Death is, of course, the most severe consequence of human sin, and the root of Christ's compassion began there. You may recall that, in John 11:35, we read about Jesus weeping over the sorrowful impact that Lazarus' death had made on his family. However, there is more tragedy here than death alone, for this woman was a widow and she had lost her only son. There were no welfare programs in that day, nor was there any way for a woman to make a living. Therefore, not only had this woman lost her only son, but she had, in the same moment, very likely lost any means she had of acquiring the basic necessities of life.

In response to her plight, Jesus didn't offhandedly say, "Oh, look, a funeral," and then moved on. No, He looked closely and saw a woman in desperate need, and His heart was broken for her. You see, Jesus put His compassion in action by focusing His attention not just on the situation at hand, but upon the people most affected by it. In the same way, we ought to be putting our compassion into action by focusing on others and on how God wants to use us to bless them. As Galatians 6:10 says, "*As we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*" // A compassionate heart is constantly looking for a heart in need.

The third thing we can learn from our text is that to walk in the compassion of Christ, we must...

3.) Be opportunistic.

To illustrate this point, I would like to share with you the story of a man whose name you probably know, who began his career many years ago as an energetic young clerk in a hardware store. Like many old-time hardware stores, the inventory there included thousands of dollars' worth of items that were obsolete or seldom called for by customers. This particular young man was smart enough to

know that no thriving business could carry such an inventory and still show a healthy profit, so he proposed a sale to get rid of the stuff. The owner was reluctant but finally agreed to let him set up a table in the middle of the store and try to sell off a few of the oldest items. Every product was priced at ten cents. The sale was a huge success and the young fellow got permission to run a second similar sale. It, too, went over just as well as the first.

This success gave the young clerk an exciting idea. “Why not open a store that would sell only nickel and dime items?” he thought. He could run the store and his boss could supply the capital. The young man’s, however, boss was not as enthusiastic. “The plan will never work,” he said, “because you can’t find enough items to sell at a nickel and a dime.”

Although the young man was disappointed, he eventually went ahead on his own, and, as it happened, he made a fortune out of his simple idea. His name was F.W. Woolworth. Years later his old boss lamented, “As near as I can figure it, every word I used in turning Woolworth down has cost me about a million dollars!”

Have you ever had a moment like Woolworth’s boss, wherein you have recognized the great cost of a missed opportunity? As most of us can probably attest, few pains are more acute than the pain of an opportunity lost. Therefore, our compassion ought to engage the world like F.W. Woolworth. That is, we ought to be resourcefully watching for opportunities to show compassion to those in need and enthusiastically grab them when they come. Or, as Colossians 4:5 exhorts, we ought to “*Conduct [ourselves] with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity.*”

We ought to be opportunistic in our compassion because that is the model we see revealed in our Lord. Whether He was showing mercy to the Samaritan by a well, summoning Zacchaeus from his perch in the sycamore tree, or bringing joy to the funeral procession we read about in today, Jesus constantly observed the events around Him in an others-focused way, and He consistently made the most of every opportunity to pour out His matchless compassion upon those in need. Let us, then, not miss the many chances to show compassion that God grants us each day. Rather, let us heed the call of Ephesians 5:16 to “*Make the most of every opportunity for doing good in these evil days.*”

It is at this point that we are blessed to notice the next step of Christlike compassion. Having observed the need by focusing on others, and having resolved to make the most of every opportunity to show compassion, we must then...

4.) Be outreaching.

In light of the opportunity Jesus observed, we see in our text that the compassion in His heart was clearly not content to stay put and let the opportunity pass by. We especially see this perspective in verse 14, where we read, “*Then [Jesus] went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, ‘Young man, I say to you, get up!’*” From this verse, I pray we all learn that we will not be very effective at putting our compassion into action unless we are willing to reach out and get our hands dirty.

Let me explain what I mean. You see, the coffin that this dead boy was being carried in would not have been a closed casket, but rather a bier (b-i-e-r), which was like an open stand upon which his body would have been laid and carried outside of the city. In that day, the Law stated that touching a dead body made a person ceremonially unclean and that the ceremonially unclean person had to be separated from others for a period of seven days. What is more, any item that even touched a dead person was also considered unclean. And the point is this: In Jesus’ day, it was utterly taboo to reach out to touch a dead person.

With that in mind, take note of way the men who were carrying the coffin reacted when Jesus reached out to touch it—they came to a screeching halt. Now, the Bible doesn’t tell us why they did that, but I imagine they stopped so suddenly was because they were so stunned. They must have been thinking, “What on earth is this guy doing?! How could this man who is supposed to be so exalted, do something so frowned upon? Doesn’t He know better?” In fact, we see a similar reaction later on in this chapter, in verses 36-50, when a sinful woman comes and weeps at Jesus’ feet, and Simon the Pharisee responds by saying to himself, “*If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner.*” But Jesus didn’t care. His compassion was far greater than His concern for convention, and so He reached out and touched the coffin, getting His hands delightfully dirty in the process.

You know, ministry that is really meaningful is often the same for us. The sin that entangles human lives is messy, and demonstrating true compassion for others often forces us to cut against the grain. In other words, authentically Christlike compassion often requires us to reach out and get our hands dirty, and compassion

is only truly put into action when we forget about ourselves and begin reaching out with the hands of Christ.

Finally, for our observant, others-focused, opportunistic, and outreaching faith to be complete, we must, most importantly...

5.) Be otherworldly.

Will you please read with me verses 13-16, where Luke writes: *“When the Lord saw her, his heart went out to her and he said, ‘Don't cry.’ Then he went up and touched the coffin, and those carrying it stood still. He said, ‘Young man, I say to you, get up!’ The dead man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus gave him back to his mother. They were all filled with awe and praised God. ‘A great prophet has appeared among us,’ they said. ‘God has come to help his people.’”*

The greatest truth that we can learn from this text is that the compassion of Christ is gloriously otherworldly because, in its fullest sense, it renders a transformation that is far beyond the scope of this world. What we can infer from our text today is the glorious truth that every act of Christian compassion has the potential to be used of Christ to raise the dead. Now, of course, we do not mean by this that our compassion can raise the physically dead. Although this may occasionally happen through CPR or an emergency defibrillator, this is not the point to be passed along to us as God's people today. Rather, as is the case with every physical miracle recorded in Scripture, there are greater spiritual realities to which they ultimately point, and the message is this: Authentic Christian compassion has Christ's offer of eternal life as its goal.

You see, our compassion ought to convey more than kindness; it ought to communicate more than mere human care. These are, of course, essential, but they are not enough, for, as believers in Jesus Christ, we have an infinitely more profound compassion to impart. In order for our compassion to be complete, we must communicate the Good News of Jesus Christ. Our great hope is that, through the kindness and concern we lavish on others, they will come to know the life-saving, life-giving, life-changing compassion of Jesus Christ.

Even as Jesus miraculously raised the dead boy in our passage to new life, He stands ready to perform an even greater miracle in the life of anyone who will trust in Him. Our Lord stands ready to rescue anyone from the spiritual death that comes from sin and raise them to new, abundant, and everlasting life in His

compassionate name. Therefore, compassion in action must always communicate the otherworldly compassion of humanity's one and only Savior, Jesus Christ.

That is our story as the redeemed in Christ, is it not? We are alive only because Jesus understood our greatest need. We are redeemed only because His heart went out to you and me, much like it went out to the widow in our text. We have true life only because He knew the devastating destruction that sin had wrought in our lives, and He took compassion on us.

Praise God that, in His compassion, Jesus observed our desperate need and focused His love on us. Praise God that the opportunity to bless us was not lost on Jesus, but that in His great compassion, Jesus reached out and got His hands dirty by coming to earth as a man for us. And praise God that our Lord revealed an infinitely otherworldly compassion that He made forever available for anyone at all through the sacrifice He made for us on the cross. With compassion beyond compare, Jesus Christ gave everything so that we, like the boy in our text today, might not die but be raised again by His grace. Now that is compassion in action.

-- Conclusion

Let me ask you then, will we engage the world around us with the compassion of Christ? God is calling us to do just that. But He is calling us to much more than compassion as an idea. He is calling us to compassion as an action. The compassion we need is not an attribute that we merely talk about, but rather one that expresses itself in acts of loving service to others.

Let us, then, then learn to clothe ourselves with a Christlike compassion that thoughtfully observes the world around us through others-focused lenses, and let us be committed to meet the needs we encounter with a compassion ready to make the most of every opportunity. To do so, let us reach out and touch lives with the otherworldly grace of Jesus Christ for the glory of God and for the blessing of those whom God is calling us to serve. If we would truly live like Christ, then we must put compassion in action.