

# Do You Know My Jesus? Part 3

# Compassion is who God Is

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## Wrath for a Moment, Compassion for an Eternity

*In overflowing wrath for a moment I hid my  
face from you, but with everlasting love I  
will have compassion on you, says the Lord,  
your Redeemer. (Isaiah 54:8)*

God is love. There are lots of questions about why suffering exists, why bad things happen to good people, and what happens in the afterlife, but one thing we know for certain is that God is love. This doesn't solve all of our problems or calm our doubts and frustrations, but it does give us the confidence that, in the end, God sets things right because God is love.

Even God's wrath, as we will talk about next week, is an act of love. It doesn't always look like that from a human perspective, but this is who Jesus has revealed God to be.

For example, in the Old Testament, or the Hebrew Scriptures as I prefer to call them, God sends Israel into exile. They had forsaken the covenant, worshipped idols, and even offered their children to false gods. In Jeremiah 13:14, God says, "I will not pity or spare or have compassion on them when I destroy them." In Isaiah 63:15, the prophet cries out, "Your great pity and your compassion are withheld from me!" In many other places, the prophets and psalmists cried out to God, asking him to show compassion once more. How many of us have similarly cried out, "Where are you, Lord? Have you forgotten about us?" (Psalm 77:9)

But, and aren't you glad there's a but, this wasn't the end of the story. Here's a few quotations:

The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.  
The Lord is good to all, and **his compassion is over all that he has made.**  
(Psalm 145:8-9)

Can a woman forget her nursing child or show no compassion for the child of her womb? Even these might forget, **yet I will not forget you.** (Isaiah 49:15)

For **a brief moment** I abandoned you, but **with great compassion I will gather you.** In overflowing wrath **for a moment** I hid my face from you, but with **everlasting love** I will have compassion on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer. (Isaiah 54:7–8)

For **the Lord will not reject forever.** Although he causes grief, he will have compassion **according to the abundance of his steadfast love;** for he does not willingly afflict or grieve anyone. (Lamentations 3:31–33)

How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, O Israel? ...How can I treat you like [the other nations]? **My heart recoils within me; my compassion grows warm and tender.** I will not execute my fierce anger; I will not again destroy Ephraim, for I am God and no mortal, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come in wrath...I will return them to their homes (Hosea 11:8–11)

### **Wrath for a moment, but compassion for an eternity: this is the God we serve!**

If this was true for Israel, with all of her faults, failures, and disobedience, how much more is it true in the reign of the Messiah, who is the exact expression of God's image? Remember, Jesus said that he could only do the things that he saw God doing, and since he saw God being compassionate again and again despite Israel's disobedience, he can't help but do the same.

## He Had Compassion for Her

*When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. (Matthew 9:36)*

Like God, Jesus can't help but have compassion on others. Throughout the gospel accounts, when Jesus would see the crowds (Matthew 9:36; 14:14; 15:32), the blind (Matthew 20:34), or a woman who had lost her son (Luke 7:13), his immediate impulse was to have compassion on them. He fed them, healed them, and raised loved ones from the dead.

Even though Jesus refused to turn stones into bread in the wilderness when he was tempted by the Devil, he couldn't help but give the people bread when he saw that they might faint, even though he knew that they only wanted to follow him because of his miracles...because compassion is who God is.

Even though Jesus wanted to give the people a different kind of sight, he couldn't help but have compassion on those he came across who had to be led around by someone else their whole life...because compassion is who God is.

And even though Jesus offered a kind of life that is greater than physical life, he still had compassion on those who had lost a loved one, from Gentiles to his friend Lazarus...because compassion is who God is.

It's amazing how...almost dull these accounts become to us over the years. When we read them over and over again, it's almost like they lose their wonder. We read passages about Jesus raising the dead as casually as we read social media posts from our friends who share pictures of every meal they eat.

There's one story that typically gets overlooked because of its brevity, but when you understand what's going on, it becomes a powerful example of Jesus's compassion. It's found in Luke 7, and it is just five verses long.

Soon afterward he went to a town called Nain, and his disciples and a large crowd went with him. As he approached the gate of the town, a man who had died was being carried out. He was his mother's only son, and she was a widow, and with her was a large crowd from the town. When the Lord saw her, he was moved with compassion for her and said to her, "Do not cry." Then he came forward and touched the bier, and the bearers stopped. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, rise!" The dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother. (Luke 7:11-15)

Now, this story is pretty cool on its own, but it begins to really come alive when you realize the cultural background behind Jesus's compassion. Under the Law, inheritance was passed down through biological reproduction. If a man passed away, his name would be preserved through his son, but if he had no son, then his next of kin would be obligated to marry his wife to produce a son on his behalf. This is what the book of Ruth is all about. Ruth's husband (Naomi's son) passes away before they have any children. The opening chapter of Ruth goes into the extent of Naomi's grief:

She said to them, "Call me no longer Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty; why call me Naomi when the Lord has dealt harshly with me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?" (Ruth 1:20-21)

Naomis sadness is obviously tied up in the fact that she lost her husband and her sons, but there are also major cultural implications to her loss: her husband's name will pass away from the

land of Israel because he has no sons to bear it (see Deuteronomy 25:5-10 for more information). So, when Ruth marries Boaz and they have a child together, the women of the town said to Naomi,

Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without next-of-kin, and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him. (Ruth 4:14–15)

Now, let's think back to Luke 7. Jesus sees a woman, who is a widow, who has just lost her only son in a similar situation to Naomi. He has compassion on her, but this compassion is not just for her lost son but for her situation in light of the culture of inheritance and passing on the family name. Even though Jesus knew that children of the kingdom would be born through faith, not reproduction, he had compassion on her. Even though he knew that God would give citizens of the kingdom a better name than sons and daughters, he had compassion on her. Often, Jesus's compassion, which is a picture of God's compassion, is most clearly seen when he meets people where they are at!

When we suffer losses that are related to our culture, Jesus doesn't stand back and say, "I told you so..." He has compassion on us because that's who he is. That's who God is. Because, after all, God is like Jesus! So when we encounter differences between ourselves, our default position should be compassion, for Paul says, "Who are you to pass judgment on slaves of another? It is before their own lord that they stand or fall. And they will be upheld, for the Lord is able to make them stand" (Romans 14:4).

Jesus knew his way was more excellent, and yet he still had compassion on this woman who was suffering a brutal loss both as a mom and as a daughter of Abraham. Jesus knew what was coming, but he still met her where she was at. Shouldn't we do the same for each other?

There are two other places in Luke where Jesus talks about compassion, and both of them have an important lesson to teach us.

## Two Parables, Two Reminders of Compassion

Compassion is a voice within us that compels us to jump into action. In the times of our lives when we have ignored this voice, we feel a great deal of shame and regret. Jesus compared this feeling in Matthew 25 to being thrown into everlasting fire. When we pass by people who are

sick, naked, and hungry, we are passing by our Savior. But for one man in one of Jesus's parables, he couldn't do anything but act with compassion.

But wanting to vindicate himself, he asked Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" Jesus replied, "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and took off, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came upon him, and when he saw him he was moved with compassion. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, treating them with oil and wine. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, 'Take care of him, and when I come back I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10:29-37)

For the Samaritan, compassion wasn't a tool to grow his religion or to one-up the Jews. Compassion simply flowed from him because of his philosophy of loving God and loving neighbor. He didn't treat his compassion like an investment, judging whether or not it would benefit him in the long run; he just did it because of who God had made him to be.

This kind of radical, self-sacrificial compassion is what God expects of us. As Jesus said, we are to go and do likewise. In Colossians, Paul told the Christians,

Therefore, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. (Colossians 3:12-15)

Compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, love, peace, and thankfulness: these qualities bring the body of Christ into perfect harmony and enable us to cooperate with God in the transformation of the world through the gospel. Notice what isn't in this list: moral perfection, theological certainty, correct religious practices, and all of the other kinds of things that bring us into perfect disorder instead of perfect harmony.

When Peter told Cornelius about the life of Jesus, he didn't mention Jesus's preaching or his arguments with the Pharisees, how he one-upped them at every turn; instead, Peter simply observed that Jesus was known for the way he "went about doing good..." (Acts 10:38).

Could the same be said for us? Are we known for going about doing good? If not, then what are we known for as a body of believers? And what are you known for in your life? Clothe yourself with compassion. Become like the Samaritan who had no choice but to stop on the side of the road and help the man who had been robbed.

Jesus, like the Samaritan, wasn't worried about his Return On Investment. Jesus ended up with around 120 disciples in Acts 1 out of the thousands and thousands of people who he fed, healed, and who heard him preach. Sometimes, I think we get a little too attached to our material wealth as Christians and worry too much about our ROI when we help someone. The Hebrews had a different attitude: "For you had compassion for those who were in prison, and you cheerfully accepted the plundering of your possessions, knowing that you yourselves possessed something better and more lasting" (Hebrews 10:34). The word "plunder" here can also be translated seizure and robbery. Does this describe our attitudes towards compassionate giving? Does it mirror the way that Jesus allowed himself to be robbed of everything from material wealth, by rejecting an earthly kingdom, to his own life, by dying on the cross?

This kind of compassion is necessary to being a Christian. We have all kinds of debates about what is necessary, but what Jesus emphasizes in his judgment passages is showing love to one's neighbor. There's another kind of compassion that we are called to show as well, and this kind of compassion is equally necessary for our walk in Christ. Let's take a quick look at another well known parable.

In Luke 15, Jesus tells the well known story which we call "The Prodigal Son." In the story, a young man asks for his inheritance before his father dies. This is basically telling his daddy that he wishes he was dead. After receiving the inheritance, the son goes into a far country and wastes it away. When he's at his lowest, he remembers where he came from, so he decides to go back home. We all remember what happens next, but let's read it anyway.

So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly, bring out a robe—the best one—and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate, for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!' And they began to celebrate. (Luke 15:20–24)

This is another story about compassion, life, and death, but the son that is received to life here is resurrected in another way, by a restoration of relationship. We must mirror this compassion in our own lives. When our brother or sister stumbles, we must be prepared to run out and meet them, with hearts full of compassion, not judgment. James wrote, “My brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and is brought back by another, you should know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner’s soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins” (James 5:19–20).

Our compassion manifests itself in two major ways: through caring for the physical needs and caring for the spiritual need. After Jesus would heal people, especially in the book of Mark, he would tell them not to tell others about what had happened. This is called the “Messianic Secret.” After Jesus’s resurrection, though, he told his followers to not hold back any longer—tell every nation! Friends, the Messianic Secret is over, so why are you keeping the good news to yourself? Do you have no compassion for your neighbors, friends, and loved ones?

We are at a time of the year when people are thinking about spiritual matters more and more as we approach Easter. Not only that, but news of revival is spreading across the country. Take advantage of what the Lord is doing and spread the good news of Jesus. This congregation does a great job of having compassion for physical needs. As we approach Easter, let’s renew our compassion for people’s spiritual needs as well...because compassion is who God is, and compassion is who he is calling us to be.