**More Like the Master**

In His Compassion

Lesson 11

*“But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion for them,*

*because they were distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a shepherd”*

*(Matthew 9:36)*

**Have Some Compassion**

Compassion means literally to be “feeling with” someone (com = with, and passion = feeling). Compassion is not just feeling for others, but feeling with others. The Greek word translated compassion is *splagchnon* and it refers to inward parts of a person; the intestines or bowels. It refers to the visceral parts of the body. Compassion, then, comes from the most inward part of a person. To be “moved with compassion” is to be moved with one’s inward parts, one’s inward feelings. Compassion is a person’s pity, sympathy, tender affection, and tender mercy for others.

Compassion is the spirit of love and mercy which is awakened by the sight of need or misery and it moves one to take action to help and assist the one in need. It takes a selfless attitude to have compassion for others. It also takes an eye for compassion. You must be willing to get your eyes off your own affairs for a moment to look up and look out and see the needful situations of others.

Jesus is our example of selfless compassion and mercy for others. His whole life was a manifestation of compassionate sympathy toward others. He was moved with compassion at the sight of one’s misery, pain, and sorrow. He would associate with all mankind regardless of their situation in life because he was without respect of persons (Matthew 22:16; Luke 20:21). What can we learn from Jesus about compassion? We learn that Jesus practiced compassion, Jesus taught compassion, and Jesus expects compassion.

**Jesus and His Compassion**

Jesus practiced compassion. First, Jesus practiced compassion toward the needy. Jesus was aware of the needs of mankind and did what he could to help them. He placed himself in their place of need. When Jesus said, *“Fill the water pots with water”,* he turned the water into wine at the marriage feast of Cana and he showed his compassion for the needs of the situation (John 2:1-12). Yes, this great miracle (“the beginning of his signs”) manifested Jesus’ glory and caused his disciples to believe on him (John 2:11), but it also showed that Jesus was compassionate toward the needs of mankind. Jesus looked outward and took notice of the needs of others. The feeding of the 5,000 was an occasion in which Jesus showed his compassion once again. Matthew writes that Jesus *“was moved with compassion toward them…”* (Matthew 14:14). He first showed compassion for his own disciples and their need for rest (Matthew 14:13; Mark 6:30-32; Luke 9:10; John 6:1-4). He also showed compassion for the needs of the multitude by teaching them (Mark 6:33-34), healing their sick (Matthew 14:14; Luke 9:11), and feeding their hunger (Matthew 14:15-21; Mark 6:35-44; Luke 9:12-17; John 6:5-14). He also had compassion on the multitude of 4,000 when they followed him and had nothing to eat. He said, *“I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with now three days and have nothing to eat…”* (Matthew 15:32). He did not want to send them away fasting so he performed a miracle and fed them (Matthew 15:32-38; Mark 8:1-9).

Second, Jesus practiced compassion toward the outcasts, the outsiders, the undesirables, and the untouchables. For example, many women and children in Jesus’ day were considered outcasts and ostracized by society, but Jesus practiced compassion toward them. Women and children were often stigmatized and considered inferior, but Jesus associated with them and helped them. Many women were found among Jesus’ followers (Matthew 27:55-56; Luke 8:2-3; John 11:32-36) and children were accepted by him and treated kindly (Mathew 18:1-6; 19:13-15).

The demon-possessed were also outsiders in Jesus’ day and Jesus practiced compassion toward them. Many had been held captive by the Devil with demon-possession (unclean spirits). Jesus had compassion on these individuals, and with his powerful authoritative word, he freed them from their demonic bondage (Matthew 8:16, 28-34; 12:22; 17:14-18; Mark 1:23-28,32,34; 5:1-21; 9:14-27; Luke 4:33-37,41; 8:26-40; 9: 37-43; 11:14). Jesus had compassion on the Syro-Phoenician woman who came to Jesus begging for help concerning her daughter who was demon possessed (Matthew 15:21-28). He told the recently healed Gadarene demoniac to go tell his friends how the Lord had compassion (mercy) on him (Mark 5:19). On one occasion, the father of a demon-possessed boy said to Jesus, *“have compassion on us, and help us”* (Mark 9:22). Jesus responded by healing the boy. After healing this boy, Luke records: *“And they were all astonished at the majesty of God”* (Luke 9:43). Truly, the power and compassion of Jesus is astonishing!

The poor and the working class citizens of Jesus’ day were also considered outcasts, but Jesus received the commoners of his day. He cared for the poor (Matthew 11:5; Luke 4:18) and encouraged others to do the same (Matthew 19:21; Mark 14:7). Jesus also received those people with a record of shame and a questionable past like the woman at the well (John 4), the woman found in adultery (John 8:1-11), the sinful woman in Simon’s home (Luke 7:36-50), and the thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43). The Samaritans were often rejected by the Jews, but not by Jesus (Luke 10:33; 17:16; John 4:9).

Third, Jesus practiced compassion toward the sick and the diseased. The sick were often considered a burden by society, but Jesus helped them. The blind, the deaf, and the lame were often mocked and ridiculed by their society, but not by Jesus. Often the afflicted would come to Jesus and beg him for healing. Jesus heard their pleading and responded with compassion. For example, a Nobleman begged Jesus for help to heal his son and Jesus did it. The whole household believed in Jesus (John 4:46-54). Jesus healed Peter’s mother-in-law who lay sick with a fever (Matthew 8:14-15; Mark 1:29-31; Luke 4:38-39) and many others on this occasion who were sick (Matthew 8:16; Mark 1:32-34; Luke 4:40-41). When Jesus was in Galilee, he taught and healed *“all manner of disease and all manner of sickness”* (Matthew 4:23-25). There were times when lepers would beg Jesus for healing and he would respond with compassion (Matthew 8:2-4; Mark 1:40-45; Luke 5:12-16). Mark writes: *“And being moved with compassion, he stretched forth his hand, and touched him, and saith … be thou made clean”* (Mark 1:41). When Jesus saw the faith of the palsied man and his friends, he healed the man with palsy (Matthew 9:2; Mark 2:5; Luke 5:20). When some people brought a blind man to Jesus in Bethsaida, they begged Jesus to heal the man and he did (Mark 8:22-26). Jesus’ compassion for the lame man caused him to ask: *“Would you be made whole”* (John 5:6). Jesus also healed a man with a withered hand and showed that he was of more value than a sheep (Matthew 12:9-14; Mark 3:1-6; Luke 6:6-11).

Jesus’ compassion for the sick and the diseased caused him to heal them and give them hope (Matthew 12:15-21; Mark 3:7-12; see Isaiah 42:1ff). Jesus showed compassion toward the Centurion when the Centurion begged Jesus to heal his servant (Matthew 8:5-13; Luke 7:1-10). Luke records how Jesus had compassion on the widow at Nain and he raised her dead son (Luke 7:11-17). Jesus had compassion on Jarius and the woman with the issue of blood (Matthew 9:18-26; Mark 5:22-43; Luke 8:41-56). He also healed a man who was deaf and had a speech impediment (Mark 7:32-37). When two blind men cried out for mercy, Jesus healed them (Matthew 9:27-31). Later, Jesus was *“moved with compassion”* and healed two other blind men at Jericho (Matthew 20:29-34). When the multitudes followed Jesus on one occasion *“he had compassion on them, and healed their sick”* (Matthew 14:13-14). After Jesus walked on the water, immediately he was begged by the multitude for healing and he accepted them (Matthew 14:34-36; Mark 6:53-56). When Jesus came into the borders of Decapolis, he healed many among the multitudes and they glorified God (Matthew 15:29-31; Mark 7:31-37). When Jesus was in Jerusalem, he saw a man blind from birth and he healed him (John 9:1-12). After the Pharisees ridiculed this man for believing in Jesus, they cast him out of the temple (John 9:13-33). Jesus found the man and encouraged him to believe (John 9:35-38).

Fourth, Jesus practiced compassion toward the lost. When Jesus went about the cities teaching, preaching, and healing the sick, he saw the multitudes and had compassion on them. He saw them as sheep without a shepherd and in need of guidance. They were like a harvest ready to be gathered (Matthew 9:35-38; Mark 6:34). What did Jesus see? Not just people. Jesus saw lost souls, he saw prospects, and he saw opportunities to save. Jesus was like his heavenly Father who was moved with compassion toward the lost. In the parable of the prodigal son, the father in the story (representing God) looked for his prodigal son (representing the lost nation of Israel) to return. When the son returned, *“his father saw him, and was moved with compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him* (Luke 15:20). Even though Jesus was criticized for associating with sinners in order to save them, it did not stop him from being *“a friend of publicans and sinners”* (Matthew 11:19; Luke 7:34).

Jesus taught compassion. Not only did Jesus practice compassion, but he taught his followers the valuable lesson of practicing compassion themselves. In the parable of the unmerciful servant, Jesus taught the importance of mercy (compassion) in the matter of forgiving others. The master in this parable was *“moved with compassion”* and forgave his servant (Matthew 18:27,33). Jesus also taught the need for compassion in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37). The Good Samaritan was not callously unconcerned like the priest and the Levite. He did not simply “pass by on the other side”. Rather, when he saw the unknown man in need, *“he was moved with compassion, and came to him, and bound up his wounds…”* (Luke 10:33-34).

Jesus expects compassion. When Jesus finished teaching the parable of the Good Samaritan, he said to the lawyer, *“Go and do likewise”* (Luke 10:37). The Samaritan had showed mercy and compassion and Jesus told the man to “Go and do likewise.” Jesus’ parable was not meant to be simply a theoretical or hypothetical discussion of what someone might do. It was meant to teach a very practical lesson of what one must do. Jesus expects his followers to practice compassion (“Go and do…”), not just talk about it!

**The Christian and Compassion**

We must have compassion for the needy. Christians, like Jesus, must have a heart of compassion. Paul wrote to the Philippian Christians: *“If there is therefore any exhortation in Christ, if any consolation of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any tender mercies and compassions, make full my joy, that ye be of the same mind, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind”* (Philippians 2:1-2). Paul wrote to the Colossian Christians:*“Put on therefore, as God's elect, holy and beloved, a heart of compassion, kindness, lowliness, meekness, longsuffering”* (Colossians 3:12). New Testament Christians, following the example of Jesus, showed compassion for those who were being persecuted and imprisoned (Hebrews 10:34). James wrote to Christians encouraging them not to show partiality toward the poor (James 2:1-4). Peter wrote to the brethren and said, *“Finally, be all likeminded, compassionate, loving as brethren, tenderhearted…”* (1 Peter 3:8). John wrote to the brethren and encouraged them to demonstrate compassion: *“But whoever has the world’s goods, and beholds his brother in need, and shuts up his compassion from him, how does the love of God abide in him?”* (1 John 3:17).

Today, Christians need to show compassion as well. There are many around us today who need our compassion. Our world is full of physical misery. There are widows, orphans, the poor, the sick, the despondent, depressed, and distressed. We need to be on the lookout for these kinds of souls to help. The compassion of the Christian is not limited to one’s close circle of friends. A true Christian will be compassionate toward all. Local churches are authorized to help needy saints from their treasury (Acts 2:45; 4:32-35; etc.) and individual Christians are authorized to help needy saints and the needy of the world (Galatians 6:10; James 1:27). So, what can Christians do to show compassion? Get involved with visiting the needy. Send cards. Call or check on the needy. Organize a relief effort. Work with the less fortunate. Volunteer to help the needy. Be hospitable. Make food for someone. Help feed or clothe someone in need. Contact people who have been hit by a natural disaster. Practice passages like Matthew 25:35-45, Romans 12:10-15, and 1 Thessalonians 5:14.

We must have compassion for the lost. Our world is also full of spiritual misery. There are many who are lost and dying in sin. Jude writes: *“And on some have mercy, who are in doubt; and on some save, snatching them out of the fire; and on some have mercy with fear; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh”* (Jude 22-23). Christians need to get out and save the lost! Like Paul (Romans 9:2; 10:1), we need to have compassion for every soul travelling the road to hell (Matthew 7:13-14). Jesus told his disciples not to wait, but to look up and see that the harvest of souls is already here (John 4:35). Will you be the answer to Jesus’ prayer to send laborers into the harvest (Matthew 9:37-38)?

We must not allow our compassion to be hindered. Compassion can be hindered by many things. First, compassion can be hindered by excuses. Christians need to be careful that they do not excuse themselves from acts of compassion. It is easy to avoid acts of compassion by saying to ourselves, “I don’t have time to…”, “I don’t want to get involved in…” “I don’t have the money to…”, “I don’t need to be around…” or “I don’t want to get hurt doing…”

Second, compassion can be hindered by materialism. Christians can be so caught up in the things of this life that they do not show compassion for others. Their jobs, their hobbies, their schedules, and their family and friends keep them from showing compassion. Like the rich man in Luke 16, many today are so well-off that they have no time for Lazarus who is laid at the gate (Luke 16:19-21).

Third, compassion can be hindered by a hardened heart. Christians can become hardened if they are not careful. They can assume the worst about a situation and become so cynical and skeptical to the point they do not want to help anyone (for example, this person doesn’t deserve my help, this person is lazy, this person is a con, this person brought it on himself, etc.). We must be careful not to “shut up our bowels of compassion” with a hardened heart (1 John 3:17; see also Deuteronomy 15:7-8).

**More Like the Master in His Compassion**

God is a God of tender mercy (Luke 1:72,78) and compassion (Romans 9:15). Jesus, like his Father, was compassionate. Jesus came to earth to do his Father’s will. He knew his Father’s will and willingly accepted to do it (John 6:38-40). Because of this attitude, Jesus had compassion on all those who needed help and saving.

As Christians, we need to have this same spirit of love and compassion for others. The heart of compassion is rare today. Many today are like the uncaring Pharisees who did not like Jesus healing on the Sabbath day (Matthew 12:14). Others are like the calloused priest and Levite who “passed by on the other side” and would not help the man in need (Luke 10:31-32). These men claimed to be religious, but they would not properly practice their religion and Jesus rebuked them for failing to show mercy (Matthew 23:23). Will we be like these uncompassionate individuals, or will we be like the compassionate Jesus? We need to pray more and study God’s word more to develop a greater sense of compassion for others. Let us all be “More Like The Master” in our compassion for others.

**Questions**

1. What is compassion?

2. How did Jesus demonstrate compassion for the needy?

3. How did Jesus demonstrate compassion for the lost?

4. What two parables did Jesus use to teach compassion?

5. What are some New Testament passages that teach Christians to have compassion toward others?

6. How can a Christian demonstrate compassion toward the needy today?

7. How can a Christian demonstrate compassion toward the lost today?

8. What can hinder a Christian’s compassion toward others?