

Compassion

by Carl McMurray

In Matthew 15 there is an excellent account of the compassion of our Lord. Beginning in verse 21 He heals the daughter of a Gentile woman who approached Him even while stating that He was not sent to minister to Gentiles. His compassion for people overcame His specific mission to Israel.

In verse 29 He begins healing among the multitudes that have come out to Him and so many lame are walking and blind seeing, that the crowd is described as amazed. They cannot be amazed that their friends were healed. After all, they helped these crippled people to get to Jesus. I get the distinct impression that they were amazed at the magnitude of the healing. Jesus was showing His compassion for every single person that needed His healing touch. No one was being left out.

In verse 32 our Lord plainly says that He felt compassion for those who were following Him to the extent that they had been with him for three days and were now out of food. Four thousand men, besides women and children, benefited from a satisfying meal because of His compassion on this account. Can anyone deny that the Messiah had compassion for anyone needing it?

Now here's the rub. Christians are supposed to be conforming themselves to the image of the Son of God. We're supposed to be becoming more like Him. Are we becoming more compassionate?

Compassion is an understanding of the emotional state of another. However it doesn't stop there with just understanding. Don't confuse compassion with empathy. Where empathy is being able to understand the state of another, compassion often includes a desire to alleviate or reduce the suffering of another or to show special kindness to those who suffer.

Where empathy is understanding the sorrowful state of another, sympathy is feeling some of that same sorrow. Compassion would drive one to do something to relieve that sorrow. Jesus had compassion for a sorrowing mother and healed her daughter. He had compassion on blind and lame individuals so He healed so many of them the crowd was amazed. And He felt compassion for a crowd that followed Him so closely they were about to go without food, so He fed them. Without the miraculous power how shall we show compassion?

First, we will have to be aware of the states of those around us if we are going to be more compassionate. Rather than pulling back from people and isolating ourselves like the culture suggests with drive through service, call up deliveries, and online relationships, we will need to interact. We will need to slow down, speak with people, and listen to them to discover their needs. There are numbers of reasons why people are suffering.

They may be fearful. The elderly become fearful of being left out, left behind, and unable to be of any use. The young parent is fearful of "messing up" when it comes to raising that child? The middle aged are fearful of becoming irrelevant? The young person has heard so much about "success" that often they are fearful of decision making lest they point their whole life in the wrong direction. Humble folks are often afraid to accept the challenge of the gospel and become a Christian. They are fearful of what that might mean or how it may change their life.

Another type of suffering that often goes unseen is loneliness. Young mothers often feel alone because we don't live in family groups anymore where moms and grand moms were close by to help. Young Christians get lonely because they're trying to abstain from people and situations that make them uncomfortable in their spirituality. This causes them to be labeled sometimes as "weird" or "uncool." Men get lonely when they try to lead their homes and lead the church and there are simply not enough role models. They're trying to figure it all out on their own without making any mistakes or asking advice that might be seen as weakness. And of course, sinners often live in their own cell of loneliness because they've decided ahead of time how worthless they are and that no Christian would understand. They wall themselves off.

Do you see where I'm going with this? I do not have the power to make the lame walk, make the blind see, or feed 4,000 men with a few loaves and fishes, but I can still be compassionate. I can do more than just feel sorry for some unknown person I read about. Taking the time to listen to people, comforting them, reassuring them, and giving wise advice (when it is asked for) is one way to be compassionate. And we are surrounded by such folk, both in the church and out. We may even be one of those folks, which should certainly make it easier to understand.

When it comes to becoming like Jesus, let's not overlook this beautiful and encouraging trait of compassion.