



Advent (Part 2) – Compassionate

Jamin Roller – December 7, 2014

Good morning. If you would, turn with me in your Bibles to Luke, chapter 1. We'll be starting in verse 5 here in just a minute. Luke, chapter 1. My name is Jamin Roller. I'm one of the Groups pastors here at the Plano Campus. As Hunter mentioned during the announcements (at least I think he did...he did in the other services), last week Chandler kicked off our Advent series. Leading up to Christmas, we're looking at the various attributes of God.

Last week Chandler kicked it off looking at God as deliverer and kind of walked through the exodus story. God delivers his people from slavery to Pharaoh out of Egypt. This morning we're going to look at God being compassionate. The next attribute we'll look at is God's compassion. What I want to do is I want to just kind of trace through the Christmas story and highlight God's compassion as exhibited in the birth narrative in Matthew's gospel and in Luke's gospel. All these stories should be pretty familiar to us just living in a religious culture.

I want to do that, but here's the thing. Before we jump into this Scripture, I feel like we need to work together to reframe our minds in a way so that the reality of God's compassion would weigh on us the way it should. What I mean by that is I feel like when we hear that God sent his Son to rescue the world, it's easy for us to think, "Well, yeah. That's what God does."

In a sense, we've just come to know him that way, but in another sense, it's easy in this culture for us to believe God *owed* the world a rescue plan. God somehow was bound or obligated to do something on our behalf in response to our sin. If I were to ask you, "What does God owe you?" or, "What does God have to do for him to still be God?" most of us would probably say, "Nothing. He is God."

But in my life, in all of our lives, there are often these things and people and gifts and relationships that, if those were taken away from us, it would cause us to seriously question our conclusions about God. "Is he who I thought he was?" We live in this culture that is constantly preaching this

false gospel that the world revolves around us, that we're the center of the universe. We have these hearts that are constantly pushing our needs to the surface, our wants to the surface, and preaching to us this message that what we want is what matters most.

Whether deliberate or not, many of us have drawn these lines in the sand that if God were to cross, we would question him. We'd reconsider our conclusions about him. It's like the guy who says, "Well, if that's who God is, then I don't believe in him," as if that's an option, as if we're talking about the idea of God and not the reality of him, as if the Bible teaches us that God is made in our image after our likeness instead of the other way around.

So listen. With that entitled culture, with that man-centric message, it's easy for us to come to the reality of God's compassion and just not be awed by it. It's easy for us to consider something like God's compassion and not be surprised, not be shocked. It's easy for us to come to this subject and presume it about God in such a way that leaves much room for entitlement and little room for gratitude.

That's where Job was at the end of the book of Job. Job has just all kinds of tragedy befall him. He loses his family and loses things. At the end of the book, Job is incredibly frustrated with God. He believes God owes him answers. We know what's going on. We know it was a test. God tells us that, and Job passed the test. "God gives and takes away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." But at the end of the book, Job is frustrated and demands things of God, believes God owes him answers.

Job calls God to court. Job demands a hearing with God and brings to God his list of questions for God to answer. God responds to Job with a list of questions of his own. "Job, where were you when I made everything? Job, where were you when I wired my world with such precision so as to sustain life? Job, when is the last time you commanded the morning? Yesterday? The day before? When is the last time, Job, you directed the lightning? When in your life, Job, have you ever simultaneously held the universe together and then also managed every intricate detail of creation?"

Job is coming to God for answers for things he doesn't know, and God reminds Job of that which he has forgotten. "I don't owe you anything, Job. I'm God. You can trust me. I'm bigger than you. My ways are higher than you." Look. That's a really, really hard word in this culture. That's a really, really difficult thing for us to wrap our minds around in this culture, because there is this thing in us that believes about God that he is in our debt in some way, and he is not.

We get to these junctures in redemptive history, and God acts compassionately, not because he has to but because he loves us. Adam and Eve are walking away from the garden and have just rebelled against God. God, not because he has to but in his compassion, clothes them, and he tells them that one day the Serpent's head is going to be crushed.

Then God initiates a relationship with a pagan named Abraham, not because he has to but because he chooses to, and says, "In you, all the nations of the world will be blessed." God hears the cries of his people in slavery in Egypt and delivers them out of his compassion, but not because he has to. When we get to the Christmas story, the passages we're going to consider, what we see here is that God hears the prayers of his people. God listens to a people who are waiting for a Savior, and he acts on their behalf, but not because he is obligated to.

When we observe God's compassion, the very first reality we observe is the fact that God chooses to do anything at all is compassionate. We'll observe this specifically in two ways. First, we'll observe this in the people God chooses to use and in the rule he brings in King Jesus. Look at Luke 1, starting in verse 5.

"In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years."

The very first thing to happen in the Christmas story is you have this proclamation that a prophet has come to prepare the way for the Messiah. If you read the Old Testament, there are prophecies that God would send one like Elijah who would prepare the way for Jesus, who would prepare the way for the Christ. The very first thing that happens is an angel goes to this couple to tell them they are going to be the parents of this prophet.

You have Zacharias and Elizabeth. Here's their bio, if you will. Here's their résumé. Zacharias is a priest. What he is doing when the angel comes to him is he is in Jerusalem at the temple, and he is one of only a few guys in the world who is allowed into the temple to burn incense as an offering to God. That's a big deal. The temple is the place where heaven and earth intersect and God's presence is held.

Zacharias twice a year would go, and he would serve in this capacity for one week. Not only that, but Zacharias is from this long lineage of priests. His dad was a priest. His dad's dad was a priest. He has this rich religious heritage. Then he married a girl, Elizabeth, who it says is from the daughters of Aaron. Aaron was the very first priest. Her dad was a priest, and her dad's dad was a priest. Together they are this couple who have a rich religious heritage.

Not only that, verse 6 says they are righteous in the sight of God. Listen to this. "**...walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord.**" All of them? Could that be said about anyone in this room? Of course not! It's the weekend, right? Walking blamelessly in all the characteristics and requirements and the commandments of the Lord. This couple is righteous. This couple is faithful. This is a power couple, right? Let them lead a Home Group. They're very righteous, very faithful.

But they don't have any kids. It says they had no child because Elizabeth is barren, and they are old in years. This is the part of their story that's just inconsistent with the rest. This is the part of their story that you read the first half of it, and then this enters in, and it's just confusing. You scratch your head, because in Judaism, in their culture in the first century, barrenness was a reproach. You were barren as a sign of judgment from God as a result of sin in your life. It was a curse.

You have this weird tension in Zacharias and Elizabeth's lives in that they are righteous, they were obedient, and yet they appear to everyone else as if they're cursed. In God's sight, they are righteous, but in everyone else's, they are suspect. You can imagine the painful and awkward conversations they would have to have over and over and over again.

"Hey, Zacharias, where are your kids?"

"We don't have any."

"Elizabeth, where are your sons who are going to carry on in their father's priestly work?"

"I can't."

"What did you do?"

"No. Nothing. We're righteous. We're blameless."

"No, no, no. What did you do? What sin did you commit?"

"No, we're not hiding anything. We're faithful."

It's in that tension, it's in that hurt, it's in that trial that God has compassion, not because he has to. God decides that Elizabeth and Zacharias in their old age would be the parents of John the Baptist, who Jesus later calls the greatest man born among women. The angel shows up to Zacharias in the temple and says, "Zacharias, you're going to have a kid." Zacharias doesn't believe him.

For me, if there's an angel in front of me talking to me, all of my biggest life questions are answered in that moment. Right? Zacharias just can't wrap his mind around it. He had prayed for so long and had just given up. See God's compassion even in that. Listen. He is coming to answer a prayer Zacharias has stopped asking for. The prayer Zacharias no longer believes, God has not forgotten. God is more longsuffering and patient about the prayers in Zacharias' life than he himself is. God is compassionate in that.

Then you get Elizabeth's response in verse 25. I'll just read it to you. She realizes she is pregnant, and Elizabeth responds. She says, "**This is the way the Lord has dealt with me in the days when He looked with favor upon me, to take away my disgrace among men.**" Just think of all the years she prayed. Think of all the years she hoped. God in his compassion at the end of her life opens her womb.

Think of all the days she came in from the city or she came in from the synagogue after an awkward conversation or after a heartbreaking interchange. She goes into her room, and she just weeps and is confused and is hurt and feels inadequate. In that moment, God says, "Elizabeth, I see you. I hear you. Just wait. I have plans for you. This won't last forever."

God, in his compassion, simultaneously answers the prayer of a waiting people by first answering the prayer of these waiting parents. He is compassionate. Then you get the next set of characters in the story: Mary and Joseph in verse 26. Let's read together. Luke 1:26:

"Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming in, he [the angel] said to her, 'Greetings, favored

one! The Lord is with you.' But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. The angel said to her, 'Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God.'"

God is becoming flesh. God is sending his Son into the world, and he handpicks this couple to be the parents of his Son. We get their bio. You get Mary and Joseph. Mary was a Palestinian peasant, a servant, a maiden. If she is engaged to a man, culturally that would have made her about 13 to 15 years old. She is engaged to a man whose name is Joseph. He is a blue-collar carpenter. Nothing special. Nothing attractive.

They're both together from the city called Nazareth. There's nothing wrong with it. It's just not that big of a deal. Right? Jesus is later criticized for being from Nazareth. **"Can anything good come from there?"** just because it's not noteworthy. Mary is this 13- to 15-year-old Palestinian peasant from Nazareth. The modern day equivalent would be some poor high school freshman from Tyler, Texas. (Nothing against Tyler, but you get it, right?) I'm from East Texas myself, so let's just own it.

God is coming, and he is presenting his plan, his redemption story, his rescue plan. The characters he begins recruiting for that are a couple of nobodies. Then Jesus is born in Bethlehem, and God says, "We need an audience for this. This is a big deal!" Immanuel, God with us. "We need an audience. We need someone who can come and herald the good news." He sends his angel to a group of shepherds, guys who had been considered both physically and culturally unclean. They hung out with sheep all day. God says, "Come watch. Come look what I've done."

What's interesting about this is the Bible says that in the fullness of time, God sends Jesus. In other words, he is about to split history into two: everything *before* Jesus and everything *after* Jesus. God is coming, and he is working. All the people had waited for and all the people had hoped for is now coming to fruition. The all-star cast he recruits is a bunch of peasants.

It's weird for us. We're reading this, and it's like, "No, no, no. Not *them*." What is God doing? Mary tells us a little bit of what God is doing in verse 46 of this chapter. Mary and Elizabeth get together. Elizabeth is her cousin. Elizabeth is pregnant; Mary is pregnant. They get together, and they're like, "We're pregnant!" That's in the Greek. Mary just starts singing in verse 46, and she gives us a snapshot into what God is doing.

"And Mary said: 'My soul exalts the Lord, and my spirit has rejoiced in God my Savior. For He has had regard for the humble state of His bondservant; for behold, from this time on all generations will count me blessed. For the Mighty One has done great things for me; and holy is His name. And His mercy is upon generation after generation toward those who fear Him.

He has done mighty deeds with His arm; He has scattered those who were proud in the thoughts of their heart. He has brought down rulers from their thrones, and has exalted those who were humble. He has filled the hungry with good things; and sent away the rich empty-handed."

Mary tells us what God is up to. God is working it in his plans and in his purposes, and he chooses to work in such a way that he sees the humble and the lowly, and he exalts them. God scans the fringes of society, and he scans the fringes of the religious landscape and the cultural landscape. He sees the marginalized and the outcast and the peasant and the poor.

He says, "I have not forgotten you. Your culture thinks nothing of you. Your rulers trample over you. Your religious elite condemn and judge you, but I see you. I have a spot for you. I'm going to use you, not because I have to but because I love you." You get this picture that God just doesn't play by our rules in this. God doesn't see the world the way we see the world. God doesn't measure value the way we measure value.

God comes in, and he uses a bunch of peasants. He uses a bunch of humble people, and he uses a bunch of forgotten people. Because when he uses those people to carry out his plans and purposes, God and God alone gets all the credit and those he uses get all the joy. He is compassionate. For us in our culture, especially in a season like this, this is both encouraging but yet challenging because this isn't how our world works.

If God had asked us to consult him, we would have said, "Look. You need to go find a princess somewhere. You need to go into the city. Don't go into the farmland. Go into the city. Find someone with a lot of money. Find someone with a lot of clout. Make a reality show out of it. Get a lot of attention, God, so people know what you're doing."

God just doesn't play by these rules because his world doesn't work like our world. The marketing cry of our culture is, "Be seen. Get noticed." It's weird, because there's this contradiction in our culture, because the way you stand out... Everyone is saying, "Stand out. Be seen!" There's this

encouragement for us to stand out, but the way in which you stand out is by looking like everyone else. Wear what they wear. Drive what they drive. Use what they use. Party where they party. God just doesn't play by those rules.

The challenge for us is, if God was going to use us in his plan right now, would he have to circumvent our ego to do so? Would he have to take away our worldly lenses, our worldly values, our worldly measurements of success and attraction and replace them with his? Would he have to humble you before he could use you?

Then there's this encouragement because what I've found... I haven't been a pastor long, but I've been a pastor long enough to know this is a really hard season for a lot of people, maybe because of the holidays or maybe just because of life. We're entering into a season where a lot of the world is really happy and a lot of the world is really celebratory, and then there are those who are just very lonely and don't have a lot.

You have the *haves* and the *have-nots*. Maybe some of you in this room are saying, "Do you know what? I align a lot more with the people in the story you're describing than I do with maybe the people in this room." The encouragement in that is the same God who heard Zacharias' prayer, the same God who opened Elizabeth's womb hears you in his compassion. The same God who uses a guy like Joseph and who uses a girl like Mary sees you working faithfully at your job, living righteously when no one is watching.

Listen. The goal for us is to not be popular. God doesn't care if we're popular. God cares if we're faithful. God doesn't want us to *be* impressive. God wants us to find him impressive. If you're in this room and you just don't have a lot and you don't know a lot and you don't feel included and you genuinely believe you're on the outskirts and you just don't have a lot that everyone else does, your value is not found in how much you hold. Your value is found in who holds you. God is compassionate.

Then you get the other side of this where God is compassionate in the people he chooses to use, but then God is compassionate in the rule he brings in King Jesus. Listen to me. This is the point of Christmas. The point of Christmas is the announcement of a King. That's it. All of the language that's used in this story... Mary is told he will have the throne of his father David. He will reign over the house of Jacob, and his kingdom will have no end. A King has come.

You get this explicitly in Matthew, chapter 2. Flip back over a couple of pages to the left. Matthew, chapter 2. I want to show us the picture of the kind of king Jesus is. Matthew 2. You get the story of this horrible guy named Herod. Look at verse 1 of Matthew 2. It says, **"Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him.'"**

So these guys... There are probably not three of them. There's probably more. The magi, the kings, the wise men enter into the story. They're very popular around Christmastime. You often probably see them at Jesus' birth giving gifts to Jesus, to a baby manger Jesus. Right? In reality, they saw the star in the east when Jesus was born, so they're traveling. More than likely when they actually get to Jesus, they get to like a 1-year-old or 15-month-old Jesus.

Listen. If the wise men are a part of the nativity scene in your living room, don't freak out. Just move them to the kitchen. They're on their way. Be biblical. You have these guys. They come into this guy named Herod and say, "Where's the King of the Jews?" Let me just summarize this for time's sake. Herod is troubled by this. He gathers his guys around and says, "Where is the Messiah going to be born?" They quote a ruler is coming out of Bethlehem.

Herod calls the magi together and tells them, "Go and find him. When you find him, come back and let me know where he is, because I want to go and worship him." The magi go. They find Jesus. They offer their gifts and are told in a dream not to go back to Herod. In verse 16, let's look. Herod realizes he has been tricked.

"Then when Herod saw that he had been tricked by the magi, he became very enraged..."

Here's what he does. **"...and sent and slew all the male children who were in Bethlehem and all its vicinity, from two years old and under, according to the time which he had determined from the magi."**

What is happening? What is this guy doing? What is he so afraid of? What is he so angry about? All of the boys 2 years old and under in Bethlehem and the surrounding vicinity would have been about 20 to 30 little boys, which is exactly the number of 2-year-old and under little boys we have in Little Village during our five o'clock service.

It's a tragedy. It's an unspeakable... The soldiers would have gone in. They would have done what they were there to do, and they would have left. They would have left Bethlehem forever changed, forever scarred. The people in Columbine have not stopped talking about what happened years ago. The people in Bethlehem would have talked about that and cried about that and grieved over that. It changed that city in tragedy.

What is this guy doing? Here's Herod's bio. Herod is the governor of Galilee. In 37 BC, he is appointed as king of Judea by Octavian and Antony. He is not a real king. His kingship is given to him by Rome, who is really in charge. The way he got his throne, the way he got his reign, was just through bribery and betrayal, which basically means he pays off a lot of the guys on top, and he kills a lot of the guys beside and below. He is not a good guy.

He lives in this tension where he lives in fear of the people above him, because Rome could just come in and do whatever they wanted to him. Then the people below him don't respect him. He called himself the king of the Jews. That was his favorite title for himself, but he wasn't actually a real Jew. He was only a half-Jew. So his reign lived in this constant state of turmoil, always threatened.

There were multiple assassination attempts on him in his life, including one from his own son who tried to poison him. Herod is an angry man. Herod is a scared man. He is as brutal as a terrorist and as insecure as a grown man taking a selfie. That was a confession. Here's a list of people who Herod killed to protect his reign. He once killed 45 rich men in his city because he needed their money to be able to pay off Rome. He killed his mother-in-law. He killed his brother-in-law. He killed two nephews. He killed his wife, and he killed three of his sons.

This didn't actually happen, but at one point, Herod had this mandate out that the day he died, he wanted all of the Jewish noblemen in the region to also be killed so there would be genuine mourning in the land on the day of his death because he knew no one would cry for him. At the end of his life, he is trying to decide who is going to take over his reign. Two of his sons had already betrayed him, and he had them killed.

His third son is plotting his assassination. He doesn't know who is going to take over his reign. He doesn't know what's going to become of his kingdom. All of a sudden a bunch of guys from the east come in and say, "Hey, where's the king of the Jews?" He says, "That's me. You're in my palace. I'm

the king of the Jews." They say, "No, no, no. Read your Bible. There's a King coming to be born in Bethlehem." Herod, in his fear, in his insecurity, goes, and he has all those little boys killed.

This is the kind of oppression God's people lived under. This is the kind of ruler they had, but it's bigger than that. Matthew includes this in his gospel, whereas the other guys don't. He includes it for a reason. The reason he does is to show us this is the kind of rule the world offers. This is the kind of king the world produces.

Regardless of when Jesus was born, there was always a Herod. There was always a Hitler. There was always an ISIS, some sort of contrasting rule the world had produced. Jesus enters into this landscape as a contrast to Herod, as the better King, the true King. Herod is a parody. Herod is the fake. Herod is the fraud. He is trying to mimic the reality of Jesus' reign and Jesus' rule.

You get this contrast where Herod murders children to protect his reign, but Jesus welcomes children as examples of those who will enjoy his reign. Herod oppresses his people through taxation. Jesus delivers his people by canceling their debt. Out of fear, Herod kills his family. Out of love, Jesus dies for his enemies. Then the greatest contrast is Herod no longer reigns. Jesus' kingdom has no end. Jesus is the true King, the real King.

The Christmas story is the announcement that the better rule is here. The better King is here, and there is no threat to his throne. God exalts him. God vindicates him. In the end, Jesus is the only one left standing. Every tyrant is exposed. Every claim to power is brought low, and it's Jesus and Jesus alone, so he can be born to poor parents. He can be raised in a humble home. He can make friends with peasants and marginalized society, because *king* is not something he is trying to become. *King* is what he has been from birth. You don't have to try to protect that which can't be taken away.

His bio reads, "Remember the guy who couldn't walk? He is running around now. Remember the guy who was blind? He sees now. Remember the lady who was sick? She doesn't have to go to the doctor now. Remember my buddy Lazarus who died? I raised him again. Remember when I went to the cross and they put me in the tomb? Three days later I walked out leaving death behind me." All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Jesus, the true King.

It puts before us this decision we have to make, this option we have. Whose rule do we want? Because listen. Everyone bows the knee to something. Our culture sells this bill of goods of freedom and individualism and self-actualization. Everyone worships something. Everyone submits to

something, someone. Everything else but Jesus is the parody. Money as king is a parody. It's a fickle master you can't keep and can't take with you.

Sex as king is a parody. It promises a satisfaction it never delivers, so you're always seeking, never attaining. You as king are a parody. You can't carry the weight of all your heart longs to worship. Jesus as king is life. His kingdom has no end. They assassinated him, and he came back to life. Where's the compassion in this Jesus? God is compassionate. Where's the compassion in this? Jesus as king is only good news if we are made fit for his kingdom.

I was born an enemy of God. I was born an opponent of Jesus. For this to be good news for me, something has to be done for me as a sinner to become a citizen. God in his compassion sends Jesus, the better king, to the cross. We don't have a King who sends us to fight his battles to expand his kingdom. We have a King who fights our battles on our behalf. He takes our sin on himself. An innocent man is treated like a guilty man so guilty men and women might be treated as innocent by God.

He conquers us in our rebellion. He turns our sinning into submission. He turns our running into worship. If you're a believer in here, then at some point, God had compassion on you to open your eyes to that truth. At some point, God had compassion on you to rescue you from the kingdom of darkness and bring you into the kingdom of his beloved Son.

For me, I'm a little boy, and I'm riding in the car with my mom. I'm asking questions, and she shares the gospel with me. God opens up my eyes, gives me ears to hear. He saves me, forgave my sins. He welcomed me as a former enemy into his kingdom as both a citizen and a son. Without him, I'd be at the mercy of the Herods of the world or the mercy of the gods of the world or the mercy of the fake kings of the world or at the mercy of the deceptive rule of my own heart. He is compassionate.

This is where it turns for us. This is where it changes for us, because if that's true, it affects how we live our lives. There's this rhythm throughout the Bible that our vertical relationship has direct consequences on our horizontal relationships. If we are recipients of compassion, we will extend compassion. If we're grateful, if it's fresh, if we've not forgotten the joy of our salvation, we will be so moved by having been treated compassionately that we will then treat others compassionately.

About a year and a half ago, my dad and my little brother are driving from DFW back home. They live five hours west of here. They are driving on Interstate 20, and it's pouring down rain. They are

going 70 mph, hydroplane, and the truck just starts rolling. My little brother is in the backseat. He was born with a birth defect called spina bifida, so he is paralyzed from the waist down.

He has had several operations in his life. Because of his condition and because of the surgeries he has had, he is not supposed to be in any kind of situation where his body is jarred. He is not supposed to ride roller coasters, much less be in a car wreck. The truck is flipping, and it slides in the other lane, facing oncoming traffic.

My dad, in fear, turns around to check on my little brother. There are these two ladies there. There are two women who had been driving behind them. One of them was a physical therapist. The other one was a nurse. Almost before the car comes to a stop, they were in the backseat. One of them was just holding my little brother's head, keeping him stable. He was fine.

Three weeks later, I'm driving in my car, and I'm following this lady. All of a sudden, she just gets run into by this truck. I remembered those ladies who cared, who showed compassion to my family. I got out of my car, and I ran up to her car. I opened up the passenger door, and I crawled in. I said, "Are you okay?" Because I had been a recipient of compassion, in my gratitude, I was eager to extend that compassion the way it had been extended to me.

That's what God would have us do. That's the way God would have us react. There's a famous seminary experiment involving the parable of the good Samaritan. Do you know the parable of the good Samaritan? Luke, chapter 10. A guy comes up to Jesus and says, "Hey, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus quotes the commandments, the last part of which is, "**Love your neighbor as yourself.**" The guy said, "Okay, well then who is my neighbor?"

Jesus tells this story. There's a guy walking down the street, and he gets beat up and left for dead. This Levite, this righteous guy, is walking down the street. He sees the man in need and walks along on the other side and does nothing. Then you have this priest who is walking down the street. He sees the man in need and walks on the other side and does nothing.

Then you have this Samaritan, the most unlikely of characters, somebody who was ethnically unclean. A Jew would not have even eaten lunch with this guy. It says his heart was full of compassion for the man. He puts him on his horse, and he takes him and bandages his wounds and pays for his lodging and loves him, has compassion on him. Jesus says, "**Go and do likewise.**"

There's this experiment with a bunch of seminary students where they took a bunch of these seminary students. They brought them into a room, and they said, "You're going to deliver a talk on the parable of the good Samaritan. Take some time to prepare. Prepare your talk, and then each of you individually is going to go to a different building, and you're going to deliver that talk to a group of people."

They have some time. They're reading through the same story I just recited to you. They're reading through it, and they come back in. They separate them into a couple of different groups. They tell one of the groups, "Okay, hey, it's time to go deliver your talk. You have a few minutes. Get over there." Then they tell the other group, "Hey, it's time to go deliver your talk. You're running late, so you'd better hurry."

Each of them goes individually to this other building to deliver their Good Samaritan speech. On the way, they encounter a man in an alleyway collapsed, suffering from some sort of illness, some sort of condition, having a heart attack or in need. The condition is unknown, but what is apparent is the man needs help. The experiment was would they stop?

Overall, 40 percent of the seminary students offered some sort of aid to the man, but of those who were told they were late, of that group, 10 percent stopped to offer any help to the man. In fact, some of them even stepped over his body on their way to talk about being a Good Samaritan. This is a group of guys who cared more about being the messenger than they did about living the message. How dangerous is that for us as Christians in a season like this!

Jesus is the reason for the season. Joy to the world. Peace on earth, goodwill to men. We're so busy, so rushed, so frantic to spend and to decorate and to celebrate. If in our celebrating, if in our festivities, if in our going about and our buying and our living in the moment and celebrating the season, if we get all of that but miss compassion, then we've missed it. If we're more marked by consumerism than compassion, then we have missed it.

I think there are three ways where we as a church can show compassion in the next several weeks. One is by simply meeting people in their need, finding those who are lonely, finding those who are suffering, finding those who are in need and pushing back the darkness with the truth of the gospel by means of compassionate acts, spending our money, spending our time. Whether that's through an organization globally, one of the ones we have in the foyer, or whether that's through something...

The challenge is don't step over the hungry on your way to eat this holiday season. Don't step over the poor on your way to spend. Don't step over the lonely on the way to family. Don't step over the oppressed on your way to enjoy peace. Another way I think we show compassion is just in our relationships, making peace. The holidays are weird. They have this way of forcing you into close proximity with people we try to avoid the rest of the year.

For many of us, that's people who have hurt us. For many of us, that's people who have wounded us. For many of us, that's people we need to forgive. Might we remember that God showed compassion to us while we were his enemy. God showed compassion to us while we had wronged him. What would it look like this holiday season for you to show compassion to your enemies, even if that means you have to care more about your enemy than you do about your wounds?

Then the last way, I think, that is just most prevalent and most pressing is to show compassion by announcing the good news of Jesus to someone. Maybe it's a Christian who needs to be reminded of the gospel, or maybe it's someone who is far from God who is outside of the kingdom who you need to share the gospel with and invite them under the reign and rule of Jesus, who loves them and died for them.

Somebody did that to you. If you're a Christian here, somebody told you. Some preacher, some author, some friend, some roommate...somebody had compassion on you. For me, it was my mom. I told you my mom showed compassion on me in sharing the gospel with me. For my mom, it was her Aunt Betsy who... When she was in high school, my mom became a believer. My aunt welcomed her into her home. She moved from where she was living. She wasn't raised in a Christian home. She moved in with my aunt, and my aunt disciplined her.

It was supposed to be for a summer, but at the end of that summer, she realized she wasn't ready to go back. My aunt let her live there for an entire year, teaching her, loving her, showing compassion on her. I was once telling my story, which is my mom's story, which is my Aunt Betsy's story. I realized I didn't know her side. I didn't know how *she* came to faith, so I called her. I hadn't talked to her in years. She doesn't live around here.

I called her, and I said, "Hey. Here's what I'm doing. I just wanted to know, who told you?" She was in junior high, and a family member paid for her to go to some conference or some camp. The Lord opened her eyes, and the Lord saved her. She said, "Hey, whoever you're telling this story to, would

you tell them something for me?" I said, "Sure." She said, "Tell them God is faithful. Tell them that through suffering and through divorce and through rape and through tragedy, God is faithful. He is today who he was then." I said, "I'll tell them."

I was about to hang up the phone, and I said, "Wait, wait, wait. Hey, thank you. Thank you for showing compassion on my mom. Thank you for telling her. Thank you for letting her in. Thank you for walking with her, suffering with her. Thank you. I am different because of that. Because of what you did to her and she in turn shared with me, my life is changed. I am who I am, I do what I do, because of what you did in her life. Thank you."

I hung up the phone, and I immediately thought, "I want that phone call some day." I want someone somewhere at some point to call me and say, "Hey, you might not know me very well, but I have a roommate or I have a sibling or I have a spouse, and you shared the gospel with them. They in turn shared it with me. You showed compassion to them, and they showed compassion to me. Because of that, I'm different. My life is different. I'm changed. I'll never be the same. Thank you."

This season is a wonderful season. It's a great context in which we can show compassion to others by sharing the gospel with them. What I want to do is the band is going to come up, and I'm going to pray. We're going to sing. I think our first reaction to all of this should be gratitude by way of worship.

We're going to sing songs about God being a good Father. We're going to sing songs about Jesus being better. If God has shown compassion to you, which he has, and if your heart is full of gratitude for all God has done, may that manifest in the next few moments with us offering our praises to him for who he is and what he has done because he is compassionate.

Jesus, we love you. We thank you for your goodness and your grace. Thank you, God, for showing me compassion. You didn't have to do that. You weren't obligated to me. You didn't owe me anything. Thank you. Thank you for those in this room who believe you, who have trusted in you.

God, for the Christian who is just having a hard time reconciling some of the tension in their life and reconciling some of the hardship of their life with your compassion, I pray you would just overwhelm them with reminders of all of the ways you've acted in the past and that they would look to those for confidence of what you'll do in the future.

For those who don't know you, Jesus, I pray you would, by your Spirit, open their eyes. You, by your Spirit, would call them from worship and submission to some king or some god or something. You've called them out of that into worship of you, King Jesus. You're worthy, and you're good. You'll never fail. We trust you with this time. We'll respond as you lead. Amen.

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