

Compassion in a Dark World

07/21/24

I started on this sermon on July 13, 2024. I was trying to think of a way to start the sermon with a story or something that would tie in with the theme. How unfortunate it is that the news of the day would become the story. One of our past Presidents had an assassination attempt on his life. In the process, other innocent people were shot as well. The value on human life is under attack. I heard on the police radio a few weeks ago a road rage incident where one of the drivers threatened another driver with a gun. People will spend thousands of dollars to protect an endangered animal, but have no problem with a human baby being killed because it is inconvenient. Some countries don't have a problem with killing the older generation because they no longer have a use to the state. This idea is starting to catch on with countries where the elderly outnumber the young – like Japan and China. Some countries in Europe don't see a problem with getting rid of the old and those who are sick. The National Geographic had an article a few years ago where they praised the decrease in children with Down's Syndrome. Abortion was the reason and how happy they were with the final results of the killing of these children. As each generation of humans passes away, we are seeing a decrease of something. We are seeing the decrease of human "compassion". We are seeing this in the church of today as well because not many Christians no longer ask the unsaved to come to church or bring them to church. This is from the lack of compassion, if we are honest with ourselves. Our ancestors were very good in reaching out to the unsaved. As the secular world has less compassion for human life, the Church has less compassion on the spiritual well being of those around us. We have to understand that a Christian should have the Spirit of God within them and part of the character of the Holy Spirit is compassion.

Let's look at some Scripture that may help us better understand God's compassion. Let's turn to Ezekiel 34: 7 – 16 as we continue with light in a dark world in the Old Testament. We've been looking at this topic for some weeks

now and we'll continue with Ezekiel today. This is what God tells Ezekiel to the Jewish captives in Babylon, "Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord. As surely as I live, says the Sovereign Lord, you abandoned my flock and left them to be attacked by every wild animal. Though you were my shepherds, you didn't search for my sheep when they were lost. You took care of yourselves and left the sheep to starve. Therefore, you shepherds, hear the word of the Lord. This is what the Sovereign Lord says: I now consider these shepherds my enemies, and I will hold them responsible for what has happened to my flock. I will take away their right to feed the flock, along with their right to feed themselves. I will rescue my flock from their mouths; the sheep will no longer be their prey. For this is what the Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search and find my sheep. I will be like a shepherd looking for his scattered flock. I will find my sheep and rescue them from all the places to which they were scattered on that dark and cloudy day. I will bring them back home to their own land of Israel from among the peoples and nations. I will feed them on the mountains of Israel and by the rivers in all the places where people live. Yes, I will give them good pastureland on the high hills of Israel. There they will lie down in pleasant places and feed in lush mountain pastures. I myself will tend my sheep and cause them to lie down in peace, says the Sovereign Lord. I will search for my lost ones who strayed away, and I will bring them safely home again. I will bind up the injured and strengthen the weak. But I will destroy those who are fat and powerful. I will feed them, yes – feed them justice! (NLT, 1241)"

God tells the people through Ezekiel that part of the problem with the division between God and Israel is that the shepherds did not do their job. In Hebrew, the term for "shepherd" is "raa" which means to care for the flock with a focus on care and concern (Strong's Concordance). God is using the term "shepherd" here because raising sheep in Israel was very important because sheep were used for the Temple in Jerusalem. So, people would know what a shepherd does. Shepherds took care of their sheep because the sheep were not to have any blemishes if they were to be used at the Temple. Now, God is using this term "shepherd" to describe the leaders of Israel which included the priest and religious leaders at that time. The sheep were the people of Israel. God lets them

know that the flock has been plundered because the shepherds have not done their job. Being a shepherd wasn't just a job. Shepherds protected the sheep, guided them, tried to keep them healthy, and got them ready for the Temple. Sheep needs guidance because they're not the smartest animals in the world. The priests and leaders had not done this with the people of Israel. They had allowed the evil nations surrounding them to penetrate into the culture of Israel. The people of Israel had started to worship false gods, which the Holy God of Israel had told them not to do. The religious leaders had allowed them to do this. The leaders had become just like the people, so the sheep lacked a shepherd according to God in verse 8. Since they are not doing their job, God will remove them from their position – verse 10. If we go back to the Hebrew term for “shepherd” we see that part of the character of a shepherd is having concern and taking care of their sheep. To take care and having concern for something requires compassion. The religious leaders at this time had lost this because they no longer cared about the people's relationship with God. God tells us in verse 8 that the shepherds cared for themselves rather than the people God had put into their care. Again, the shepherds didn't care about the people's relationship with God, so they let them do whatever they wanted – like worship other gods. They had no compassion for their flock. If we turn ahead into the New Testament, the command to religious leaders from God has not changed. Paul tells Timothy, a young pastor, this in 2 Timothy 4: 1 – 5, “And so I solemnly urge you before God and before Christ Jesus – who will someday judge the living and the dead when he appears to set up his Kingdom: Preach the word of God. Be persistent, whether the time is favorable or not. Patiently correct, rebuke, and encourage your people with good teaching. For a time is coming when people will no longer listen to right teaching. They will follow their own desires and will look for teachers who will tell them whatever they want to hear. They will reject the truth and follow strange myths. But you should keep a clear mind in every situation. Don't be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Work at bringing others to Christ. Complete the ministry God has given you (NLT, 1944).” The command God gave to the priests and religious leaders in the Old Testament actually remains the same in the New Testament. The Lord has Paul give the command to preach the Word of God whether the time is favorable or not. Patiently correct, rebuke, and

encourage the people. This requires compassion. Religious leaders have to care about the sheep that is in their flock and have to preach on topics that may raffle a few feathers because they don't want anyone to draw away from the Lord. Even if the people reject the truth of God, Paul tells Timothy to keep a clear mind and he may have to suffer for the Lord because of it. All of this is done in compassion. We have to understand something today. If we want compassion for people today, we must ask Jesus to help us to have compassion because the human nature doesn't like to show compassion on people, instead it breeds hate. We see it all around us in the world we live in today. At the Republican Convention, the Vice President was picked. All you heard from the other side was racial remarks about an all-white ticket and other stupid political statements. When the other party have their convention in a few weeks, the other side will say stupid things as well. There is no compassion in politics. Let's be careful we don't get caught up in all the verbal abuse for the next few months. God sets the bar for what compassion looks like.

If we go back to Ezekiel 34, we see that God will now take over as the shepherd of His flock because the religious leaders failed terribly. In verse 10, God tells us that He is against the shepherds and will remove them. God, Himself, will take over. In fact, if you look over verses 11 – 16, all you see is "I will" throughout these verses. God will rescue the people, He will tend to them, He will search for them, and He will shepherd the flock with justice. God will set the example of how a shepherd is to take care of the flock and compassion is the reason for this. God loved the people of Israel, even though they were usually disobedient most of the time just like we are today. Compassion is part of the Lord's character. We read this in Psalm 78: 38, "Yet He, being compassionate, atoned for their iniquity and did not destroy them; he retrained his anger often and did not stir up all his wrath. (ESV, 418)" The Hebrew term used here is "rahum" which means merciful and full of compassion (Strong's Concordance)". In other words, God is merciful and **full** of compassion. Even after Israel had been so disobedient to God, God did punish them, but He did not give up on them. He showed them mercy and was full of compassion for them. God's character has not changed for today. Isn't that great news for today?

When God sent His Son Jesus to walk this sinful earth, we read this about Jesus in Matthew 9: 36, “When He (Jesus) saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. (ESV, 694)” Even during this time period, the religious leaders had failed to do their job and Jesus had to come to show what compassion looks like on this earth. Jesus had compassion for the people because they were harassed and helpless. Have you ever felt that way? The Greek term used for “compassion” here is “splachnizomai” which means to have compassion on – moved with compassion (Strong’s Concordance). It’s a verb, so this is an action that Jesus had for the people. Jesus had compassion for the people, so He would reach out and touch them and make them well. In Matthew 14: 14, we read this about Jesus, “When He went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick. (ESV, 698)” Another example is Matthew 15: 32, “The Jesus called his disciples to him and said, ‘I have compassion on the crowd because they have been with me now three days and have nothing to eat. And I am unwilling to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way.’ (ESV, 700)” Jesus, the Son of God, has the same character trait as His Father who sent Him to die for our sin on the cross. Why, because He has compassion on us! Paul tells the New Testament Church, which includes us, this in Ephesians 4: 32, “Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you (NIV).” This is a command to us. We can’t water this down. If we do the opposite to people around us, we’ll do the same with Jesus. We must be and remain a compassionate people because the Lord was compassionate on us. As our culture becomes more filled with hate and lives out hate, let’s make sure we tap into the Holy Spirit through Jesus and allow Him to help us to be compassionate like He is. Jesus has set the tone for us. Let’s be a compassionate people – ask the Lord to help us to be that way always. Compassion brings light to a dark world.

NLT Life Application Study Bible. Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.: Wheaton, 1996

The Strongest Strong’s Concordance. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2001

The Holy Bible ESV. Crossway Bibles: Wheaton, 2005