

9. Sharing the Gospel Through Compassion

In our last two topics, we have pointed out that Christ and the disciples shared the Gospel through confrontation with certain groups of people and used clarification with other groups of people. Today, we will be looking at another very common approach that Christ and the disciples used with different individuals and groups. Many times, in the New Testament, we see that an approach based on compassion was used in sharing the Gospel.

Christ used confrontation when talking to the religious leaders and those who thought they were “good”. We saw in the parable about the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:10-14 that the Pharisee thanked God that he was not one of the “bad” people like the, “extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector.” Meanwhile, “the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat on his breast, saying, ‘God be merciful to me a sinner’.” The Jewish religious leaders focused on how “good” they were and how “bad” the rest of the people were.

Many times, the tax collectors and sinners felt that they were so “bad” that God would never forgive them, until Christ arrived on the scene. As we study the ministry of Christ, He showed great compassion to those who felt they were “bad”. A few illustrations of this are Matthew 9:9-11, “As Jesus passed on from there, He saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax office. And He said to him, ‘Follow Me.’ So he arose and followed Him. Now it happened, as Jesus sat at the table in the house, *that* behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat down with Him and His disciples. And when the Pharisees saw *it*, they said to His disciples, ‘Why does your Teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?’” In Mark 12:37, we see that the common people heard Christ gladly. In Luke 15:1, we read, “Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him.” When Christ talked with the Samaritan woman in John 4, and the woman caught in the act of adultery in John 8, we see that He also used compassion as He talked with these women.

First, we have to see those needing compassion. In Matthew 9:36, we read, “But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.” In this verse, Christ was moved with compassion. There were several things He observed that caused Him to be moved with compassion. It is only as our lives are yielded to Christ that we will really notice the people, that need compassion, as Christ noticed them. We will be moved with compassion when:

1. We see the multitudes - the multitudes were the crowds of common people and were often viewed with contempt by the rulers and leading men. “To see” means *to pay attention to and notice so that it causes us to see what needs to be done so that we can take action.* (I read recently that in the United States only five percent of those living in multi-unit housing attend any church - multi-unit housing includes: apartment buildings, mobile home parks, government housing projects, senior housing, and other types of multiple dwelling units)
2. We see the faint - the faint speaks of the tired, the weary, the fainthearted, the despondent, and the weak

3. We see those who are scattered abroad - the scattered abroad speaks of those who are thrown down or rejected by society

4. We see those who are like sheep having no shepherd - the unloved and ignored (Matthew 25:35-40 talks about the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and those in prison)

Second, we choose to accept those needing compassion. Luke 15:20 and 22-24 say, “And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him... But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring out the best robe and put *it* on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on *his* feet. ‘And bring the fatted calf here and kill *it*, and let us eat and be merry; ‘for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.’ And they began to be merry.” Once the father saw the son and had compassion, the father did several things to show the son that he was accepted and forgiven.

The father:

- ◆ Ran and fell on his neck and kissed him - Christ accepts people just as they are even when they smell like a pig pen - Ephesians 1:6. We follow Christ’s example by accepting people just as they are.
- ◆ Put the best robe on the son - Christ took our sin and gave us His righteousness - 2 Corinthians 5:21. We follow Christ’s example by forgiving past offences.
- ◆ Put a ring on his hand - Christ accepted us as family members - Romans 8:14-17 (the ring was a sign of belonging to the family). We accept others as Christ accepted us - Romans 15:7
- ◆ Put sandals on his feet - Christ helps us learn to have peace - Ephesians 6:15 (our feet are shod with the gospel of peace). We focus on a ministry of reconciliation - 2 Corinthians 5:18
- ◆ Killed the fatted calf - Christ makes us worthy and honors us - Matthew 9:9-10 (the fatted calf was the animal kept to provide a feast for special guests). We choose to eat with those others reject.
- ◆ Feasted and celebrated with the son - Luke 15:2, 7, 10 - We choose to celebrate with those who respond to compassion.
- ◆ Spoke of the new life of the son - 2 Corinthians 5:17 - We help the person realize he has been recreated in the image of Christ and that everything that Christ does is very good - Genesis 1:26-31

When I am working with a person who feels that he is “a bad person”, I often ask the person if he is “a bad person” or “a sinner”. The normal response is that the person asks, “What is the difference?” I explain that the word bad means something that is “worthless, unacceptable or defective”. As a result, a person who feels that he is “bad” usually feels that he is worthless, unacceptable, and defective. In contrast, a person who is “a sinner” can have his sins forgiven by Christ if he comes to Christ with an attitude of repentance - Luke 18:13-14; Acts 2:38, and 26:18. Then, I will often share about the prodigal son - Luke 15, Zacchaeus - Luke 19, the Samaritan woman - John 4, the woman caught in the act of adultery - John 8, or the Corinthians - 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.

Once the person becomes a Christian, I will ask him if he is “a bad person”, “a sinner” or “a saint

who sins”. Remember that even though there are major problems in every chapter of the book of 1 Corinthians, the Corinthians are still called saints - 1 Corinthians 1:2. Over the following weeks and months, you will probably need to ask the person many times whether he is” a bad person”, “a sinner” or “a saint who sins” because there will be many people, used by Satan, who will try to make him feel like “a bad person” again.

Christ will use each one of us to transform the lives of people needing compassion if we will see those who need compassion and respond with compassion. May the Lord richly bless you as you recognize people needing compassion and love them to Christ by your acceptance and love.