

Glory in His Face: Compassionate Savior

Matthew 9:35-38

By [David Strain](#)

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Now last Lord's Day Evening we began a new series of sermons entitled, "Glory In His Face," looking at the person and the work of Christ. And we started by considering the union of deity and humanity in His one person - two distinct natures in the one person of Christ, united in Him forever. And now tonight, the second glory that I want to consider with you that attaches to and pertains to the person of Christ is one that I think I'm safe in guessing we rarely devote sustained time to contemplating, at least not directly. I want to turn your attention to the compassionate heart of Christ. The compassionate heart of Christ. Compassion, as B. Be. Warfield once remarked, "the emotion which is most secretly attributed to Him." Now think about that. Isn't that remarkable? Doesn't it speak volumes about our Jesus that, more than any other feeling that moves His heart, compassion is the emotion most frequently attributed to Him. Spurgeon said if you would sum up the whole character of Christ in reference to ourselves it might be gathered into one sentence; this one sentence - "He was moved with compassion." What a great argument for trusting Him and running to Him and resting on Him that His heart beats with compassion towards us. So often the reason we hold back in our relationships with one another and do not divulge the intimacies of our hearts to each other is because of the fear of rejection, right? We don't know what kind of reception we're going to receive so we hold back and we self-protect. We needn't fear what kind of reception we will receive from Jesus. The heart of Christ beats with compassion for you that you might learn to go to Him and trust in Him.

Now there are any number of places where we might turn to see this in the Gospel records, the compassion of Christ. And we're going to be doing something of a survey of many of them together this evening, but let me invite you to turn your attention with me for now to Matthew's gospel, chapter 9, verses 35 to 38. Matthew chapter 9 verses 35 to 38. Before we read God's Word, would you bow your heads with me as we pray together?

Our Father, we bless You that You have shown Your kindness towards us in Jesus Christ, that our of the great love with which You have loved us, though we were dead in trespasses and sins, You have made us alive together with Christ

and lavished upon us the gift of Your Spirit and inhabit, by His presence and power, the praises of Your people, and is now with us as we sit under the ministry of Your Word. Oh grant to us afresh this evening we pray, a sight of the compassionate heart of Christ through the ministry of the Holy Scriptures in the power of the Spirit of Your Son, in whose name we now pray, amen.

Matthew's gospel, chapter 9 at verse 35. This is the Word of Almighty God. Let's give careful attention to it:

And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest."

Amen, and we praise God for this reading from His holy and inerrant Word. May He write its eternal truth upon all our hearts.

In his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Viktor Frankl tells of his experience of life in a Nazi concentration camp. He arrived at Auschwitz in the final years of the war on a train crammed with other Jewish people heading for internment at the camp. The prisoners were forced to file past an SS officer standing in pristine uniforms in a pose of assumed indifference. His left hand supporting his right elbow he would lazily inspect each prisoner and with a flick of his right index finger, either to the right or to the left, their fate would be decided. If he pointed to the right you were sent to the camp into a life, albeit a short one, of forced labor. The rumor among the prisoners was that if the SS officer pointed to the left you were sent to a special camp for the weak and the infirmed. Frankl approached the guard who looked him over and with a twitch of his index finger sent Frankl to the right. "The significance of the finger came was explained to us in the evening," writes Frankl. "It was the first selection, the first verdict made on our existence or non-existence. For the great majority of our transport, about ninety percent, it meant death. Their sentence was carried out within the next few hours. Those who were sent to the left were marched from the station straight to the crematorium." It is a chilling account of power and authority exercised entirely without compassion. That comes close, I think, to a definition of abuse, doesn't it? Power and authority exercised without compassion.

The portion of Scripture that we just read together a few moments ago is located in a context filled with illusions to the use of power and the exercise of authority, an authority surpassing any other. Matthew is actually at some pains here to show us Jesus is possessed of an authority that is staggering in its dimensions. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount in chapter 7, verses 28 and 29, the crowd, hearing Jesus, are astonished because He taught "as one having

authority and not as their scribes.” And then in chapters 8 and 9 there is a string of miracles that are designed to underline and highlight that point. So at the beginning of chapter 8 Jesus touches a leper and with a word He makes him clean. A centurion invites Him to come heal his paralyzed servant but insists, “Lord, I am not worthy to have you under my roof. Only say the words and my servant will be healed. For I too am a man under authority with soldiers under me. And I say to this one ‘Go’ and he goes and to this one, ‘Come’ and he comes, and to my servant, ‘Do this’ and he does it.” Jesus marveled at the faith of this man and his grasp of the unique authority of Jesus. And so from a distance with a word He heals his servant.

In 8:23-27 there is Matthew’s account of the stilling of the storm. We looked at this same example from Mark’s gospel last Lord’s Day Evening. And the Savior’s authority silencing of the elements with a word so that the disciples are left trembling in astonishment and fear asking, “Who is this? What manner of man is this that even the wind and the seas obey Him?” In 9:1-8, Jesus’ authority to forgive sin is proven by His healing of a lame man. “And when the crowd saw it,” Matthew says, “they were afraid and they glorified God who had given such authority to men.” And then in the first half of chapter 10, Jesus gathers His twelve apostles to Him and He delegates authority that they may join Him in the ministry and mission He has been modeling before their eyes. In verse 1 we read, “He called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits to cast them out and heal every disease and every affliction.” So this is a portion of the Gospel story - all about the authority and the power of Jesus. He has power over wind and waves and sea, authority to command demons, He speaks and the lame walk and the paralyzed are released and the leper is cleansed. He has power unlike any other.

But we can see immediately, on the surface of it, that this is power that is altogether different from the arbitrary, despotic, and destructive power that Viktor Frankl witnessed. That’s a wicked power the SS officer exercised with a twitch of his index finger. This is the power of a different nature entirely. The story’s told of a woman who had a reputation as a medium, a spiritist, attending one evening the worship service led by Martyn Lloyd-Jones during his early days at Sandfields in Wales. In a note to Lloyd-Jones sent after her conversion, here is how she described what she encountered that night in church. “The moment I entered your chapel and sat down on a seat amongst the people, I was conscious of a supernatural power. I was conscious of the same sort of supernatural power I was accustomed to in our spiritist meetings but there was one difference. I had the feeling that the power in your chapel was a clean power.” That’s it, isn’t it? It’s a clean power, a healing power, a power that restores and delivers and makes new.

At the end of chapter 9 in the passage we read together we are taken behind the doings, the acts, and the words, the sayings of Jesus, to the feelings and the motives of Jesus, what inspire them and drive and direct them. Here’s the reason

that the extraordinary power and authority of Jesus Christ, power like no one else, never evolved into abuse. Verse 36 - "When he saw the crowds he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless like sheep without a shepherd." He had compassion for them. That is the great mark of Jesus' use of power. That's what makes it a clean power and a cleansing power. It is directed and guided and filled with compassion. Over and over again in the gospels the compassion of Christ shines out with beauty as the great motive for His ministry. You might say compassion is like the laser targeting system that enables Him to deploy His power with precision, directly at the point of need in the lives of lost and broken and desperate - men and women and boys and girls.

THREE CATEGORIES OF PEOPLE WHOM CHRIST SHOWERS HIS COMPASSION

THOSE WHO CALL ON HIM IN FAITH

And so as we survey the gospel records together and get to notice the compassion of Christ, I want you to see with me first of all three categories of people upon whom Christ showers His compassion. First there are the instances where Jesus clearly responds with compassion to those who call on Him in faith. In Mark chapter 1 verse 41 a leper tells Jesus, "If you will, you can make me clean." And in answer, we are told that Jesus is "moved with pity" and He stretches out His hand and He says, "I will be clean," and He cleanses the leper. In Matthew 20:29-34, Jesus met two blind men who cry out, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" The crowds rebuke them, try to silence them, they cry out for mercy all the more loudly and when He inquires what they want Him to do they say, "Lord, we would see, we would have our eyes be opened." And verse 34 reads, "And Jesus, in pity, touched their eyes and immediately they recovered their sight and followed him." So here's a great encouragement to believe on Jesus and to cry out to Jesus in the knowledge that He can answer. He has the resources and the compassion to deploy them to the great good of our souls. His compassion responds to the cries of faith. Believe, trust, cling to Christ, cry out to Him, and you will find an answer in the compassionate heart of Christ.

GENUINE BUT NOT GREAT FAITH

But how much faith is necessary? Here's another category of those who received His compassion. For example, Mark 9:22. A father pleads with Jesus on his son's behalf. "If you can do anything," he says, "have compassion on us and help us." Jesus replies, "If you can? All things are possible to the one who believes." "Lord," the man answers, "I believe; help my unbelief." And Jesus responded to his light but real faith with the compassion that he saw and delivers the boy. Here's weak faith, here's compromised faith, fragile faith, meager and fearful and mixed with uncertainties, but it is real faith nonetheless. It looks to Jesus, truly, and trusts Him despite the enormity of the circumstances. It is real faith, not so

much great faith, that the compassionate Christ responds to. Isn't that an encouragement? It's real faith, not so much great faith, that the compassionate Christ responds to.

COMPASSION PRECEDING FAITH

But then there's a third category of people on whom Jesus showers His compassion. There are those instances where His compassion precedes faith altogether. And how thankful we should be for those episodes! Luke 7:13 is an example. Jesus encounters a widow in the town of Nain. Her only son and thus in her own culture her only means of support and care and provision has died and is being carried out on the bier and she is bereft and is overcome with grief. She's not thinking about Jesus. She's not looking for Jesus. She is not asking for a miracle. She's simply broken and distraught at the death of her only son. But when the Lord saw her - she's not looking for Him - but when the Lord saw her, Luke says, He had compassion on her and said to her, "Do not weep." He touched the bier on which the body lay and commanded the dead young man to rise and he was restored to life.

Maybe some of us here this evening believe and are crying out to the Lord for mercy like the leper in Mark 1. You know if He wills He can make you clean. You believe and you know where to go with your sin and your need for cleansing and your need for help and deliverance and you're running to Jesus. Some of us are, perhaps, praying, "Lord, if You could help me have compassion," but are having to confess as you do, "I believe; help my unbelief." The enormity of your trials shake your confidence. Your faith is trembling with uncertainty, but if you're looking to Jesus it is enough. Part of the lesson the gospel accounts teach us is simply that no one who truly sought the saving compassion of Christ was ever turned away. No one who ever sought the compassion of Christ was ever turned away. The compassion of Christ abounds in grace toward all who call on Him. Every cry, albeit even the trembling, doubting, uncertain cry, but every cry from a believing soul gets a hearing in the compassionate heart of Christ.

But maybe you are here and you're not really sure why. You're not looking for Jesus. Maybe you're here to please someone else. Maybe you're here out of some vague awareness of duty - "This is what I'm supposed to do." Maybe you're here - who knows why; you're just here. What you do know is that like the widow of Nain you are gripped with the reality of your own need. That's what you know. That's what you see. That's what occupies you. You know your need. If that's you, then you should understand the compassion of Christ is moved towards you too and it may just be that this evening is the time, the appointed time, when that compassion with burst in on you, all unlooked for, all unexpectedly, and bring you to Himself. If you're not here looking for Jesus, maybe He's here looking for you. The three categories of people upon whom He showers His compassion.

THREE WAYS CHRIST SHOWS COMPASSION IN THE GOSPELS

COMPASSION FOR PHYSICAL NEEDS

And then also there are three ways in which He shows His compassion in the gospel stories. And here I want you to think with me about the compassion of Christ on the masses, on the crowds that attended His ministry. In Matthew 14:13-21, Jesus went ashore, we are told, “and saw a great crowd and had compassion on them and healed their sick.” In Matthew 15:30-39, in the account of the feeding of the four thousand, Jesus declared, “I have compassion on the crowd because they’ve been with me three days and they have nothing to eat, and I’m unwilling to send them away hungry lest they faint on the way.” He’s filled with compassion here concerning their physical needs. You mustn’t think Jesus doesn’t care for our bodies and cannot sympathize with us in our physical needs. Some of us, maybe you’re wrestling with real financial troubles. Some of us are sick, chronically, persistently sick. Some of us struggle with sorrow we can barely speak the names of. You must not imagine that the compassion of Christ is only interested in an abstraction called souls. He’s interested in you; in what you might think are the mundane details. His heart is moved with compassion for you - for your body that’s failing you, for your hurts and your sorrows and the daily trials that etch themselves into your life. The gospel accounts help us to see, I hope you’re beginning to sense it, the gospel accounts help us to see that we can cast all our cares, even these mundane cares - whatever they are - upon Him because He cares for us. Hebrews 4:15 tells us that “we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with us in our weaknesses.” There is no footnote, there is no small print excluding physical needs. He took a body, remember, that He might sympathize with us in our own natures having compassion on us as we live with bodies that break down and with physical needs that overwhelm us.

COMPASSION FOR SPIRITUAL NEEDS

But His compassion also finds its expression in another way. Mark chapter 6 - we have the account of the feeding of the five thousand. And in Mark 6:34 we read, “He saw a great crowd and he had compassion on them because” - and note this; we’ll come back to it - “they were like sheep without a shepherd and he began to teach them many things.” So this time the compassion of Christ is aroused and it leads Him not first of all to meet physical needs but to teach them the Word of God. If compassion is the characteristic emotion that attends our Savior’s ministry, preaching and teaching were the characteristic methods of His ministry. Filled with compassion, He taught them many things. That we have the ministry of the Word of God among us is evident, it is proof of the compassion of Christ upon His people still. Jesus is moved with compassion as He sees us and as He teaches us His Word for - what is it, 176 years? We’ve enjoyed the ministry of Christ, teaching us His Word, comforting us in sorrow, encouraging us to go witness, strengthening us in service, convicting us of sin, building our faith

and directing our obedience, Lord's Day by Lord's Day by Lord's Day. And it has been a token to us of His unfailing compassion.

COMPASSION FOR HIS OWN

And then finally, I wonder - I hope you've noticed the two occasions in which the gospels tell us that Jesus' compassion was particularly aroused because the people were like sheep without a shepherd - Matthew 9:36 where we read earlier at the start of our time together, and Mark 6:34. They were like sheep without a shepherd. That is a phrase that is drawn from the book of Numbers, actually, chapter 27 and verse 17, in which a man is called to care for God's people after Moses, one who "shall lead them out and bring them in that the congregation of the Lord may not be as a sheep that have no shepherd." That man, as it turns out, was Joshua. The phrase is next used during the reign of the kings. 1 Kings 22 - this time, however, to describe what happens to God's people when wicked kings have their way and wicked rules reign over them. They do indeed now become as sheep without a shepherd. But then the prophet, Isaiah, in Isaiah 40 and verse 11, promised a day when the Lord God would come and "He will tend His flock like a shepherd. He will gather the lambs in His arms. He will carry them in His bosom and gently lead those who are with young." One day, another Joshua, a greater than Joshua, would come who would faithfully shepherd the flock to be the Good Shepherd.

Matthew 9:36, Mark 6:34, are telling us that that Shepherd is the Lord Jesus Christ. What is staggering is the way in which He shows His compassion for the sheep. As John 10:11 tells us - how does He do it? He does it by laying His life down for the sheep. As Isaiah would go on to say, the shepherd will himself be "like a lamb that is led to the slaughter and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent so He would not open His mouth." And why? Because "all we like sheep have gone astray, and the Lord has laid upon Him the iniquity of us all." The Savior who was moved with compassion for the harassed and the helpless, the sheep without a shepherd, shows His compassion most fully at the cross. "Having loved his own," John 13:1, "he loved them to the end." Are you unsure that Jesus really cares? Are you unsure that He is filled with compassion for you in the details of your case? Have the dark trials in your experience made you wonder about the mercies and the compassion in the heart of Christ toward you? Look at the cross. Look at the cross. The Good Shepherd lays down His life for His sheep. Here is compassion at its fullest expression. Bearing your condemnation He dies that you might live. It's a great demonstration of His love for you, His compassion toward you.

So we've seen how Jesus is full of compassion for you if you're a believer, filled with compassion for you even if your faith trembles and struggles so that you're saying, "Lord, I believe; help my unbelief." He's even filled with compassion for you if tonight you're not looking for Him at all. In His compassion Jesus is looking for you. Luke 15 - He's like the father in the story of the prodigal son, remember?

The prodigal son is still a long way off, but the father sees him and, “filled with compassion,” Luke said, “he ran to him and embraced him and brought him home and restored him to sonship.” Full of compassion, Jesus is coming to you in the Gospel, that you might be His and He might be yours. And we’ve seen Jesus is full of compassion concerning the needs of our bodies and our homes, full of compassion for the mundane details. He finds none of our trials beneath His notice; none of our trials beneath His notice. And He’s full of compassion for our spiritual needs. With compassion He teaches us many things. He has given us His Word to guide us and direct us and nourish us and grow us. And especially moved with compassion for us in our sin and our guilt and our lostness. He dies for us.

Now let me ask you, who would not trust such a Savior who so cares for you? Who is excluded from the reach of His compassion? Not you! Not you as you hear His Word, not you as you call for mercy, not you as you wrestle with sin; not you - not anyone. When Jesus in Mark 6, full of compassion, fed the five thousand with the five loaves and the two fish, remember there were twelve baskets left over? What’s that all about? I think it’s saying to us you can never exhaust the compassion of Jesus Christ. It overflows. It super-abounds. His compassions they fail not; great is Thy faithfulness. Or as Watts puts it - “Where He displays His healing power, death and the curse shall reign no more; but Adam’s race in Him shall boast more blessings far than Adam lost.” There’s more compassion in Jesus than there is need in you. Where sin abounds, grace abounds all the more. There is more grace in Jesus than there is sin in our rebel hearts. More is won by Christ than is lost in Adam. His compassions overflow, they abound; there is a surplus of them. An excess of mercy. An overflow of pity. There is compassion enough for all in the Lord Jesus Christ. You will never get to the bottom of the ocean of His compassion for you. But wouldn’t you like to try? What needs do you have that you won’t go to Him with it seeing His compassionate heart? What burden do you carry that you won’t gladly cast it on Him knowing how much He cares for you? What sin so dark that His compassion has not made complete provision for it in His wounds at Calvary? Will you come and rest in your compassionate Savior?

Let’s pray together.

Oh Lord our God, we praise You that Jesus loves us. That is astonishing that He loves us, that His heart burns not with anger at our sin merely, but with compassion for us in our sin. Oh grant to us grace to run and rest on our compassionate Savior, for we ask it in Jesus’ name, amen.

Would you stand and receive God’s benediction?

And now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God our Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forevermore. Amen.

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