

Compassion for the Lost

"The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love..." - Exodus 33:6

"When he (Jesus) went ashore, he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them, because they were like sheep without a shepherd." - Mark 6:34

"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost." - Luke 19:10

God's Compassion

When we talk about the character of God, one of his characteristics is compassion. Compassion is God's affections of good will and kindness expressed toward people. Compassion is a form of love. We see in many scriptures that God's heart is moved with compassion for those that are suffering, broken, and lost apart from him. It was God's love and compassion that led the Son of God to leave heaven to take on flesh, live a perfect life, die on a cross, and be raised to life. When we discuss "compassion" we're talking about the character of God revealed in Jesus Christ.

The Lost

The Lost are those who have no Good Shepherd to rescue them from the thief or wolf (Satan). They are helpless, hopeless, and without God in the world (Ephesians 2:12). The Lost are people separated from God because of sin that he desires to reconcile to himself and become their Good Shepherd. The goal of God's compassion is for people to recognize and experience his tender mercies and for God to receive praise, honor, and glory from us.

"As I live, declares the Lord God. I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from their way and live." - Ezekiel 33:11

Numbers are important to God because numbers represent people. Even though not every person will be saved, we see in scripture that God takes no pleasure in unbelievers

rejecting his offer of salvation. He has made salvation available to anyone who will turn to him in faith and repentance. God is actively pursuing lost people to be restored to a right relationship with himself through the proclamation of the Gospel (Romans 1:16).

“For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people.” - Titus 2:11

God is gracious and compassionate to those who don't know and honor him

“The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.” - Psalms 145:9

“For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.” - Matthew 5:45

God cares, provides, and extends his grace toward all people. If not for God's compassion and loving care, Believers and Unbeliever would cease to have breath in their lungs, food, clothing, shelter, or any good thing (James 1:17). The compassion that God extends toward the Lost is tangible evidence of his existence and goodness (Acts 14:16-17).

God's heart is grieved when the Lost reject him

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling.” - Matthew 23:37

This passage is not only a judgment passage but also a lamentation. Jesus was pronouncing judgment on those who rejected him and lamenting over those who refused to receive him as Lord and Savior. Although God will judge unbelievers and execute his justice on those who do not love the truth so as to be saved (2 Thessalonians 2:10), we see that God's heart is grieved when people reject him and perish to their own destruction. This was true for the people of Israel during this time, and this is true for all those who reject Jesus today.

Jesus' mission of compassion

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." - Luke 4:18-19

"When he went ashore, he saw a crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick." - Matthew 14:14

We see in the above scriptures that compassion is at the center of who Jesus is and how he ministered to people while on the earth. Jesus said that "to see him was to see the Father" (John 14:8-10). Jesus saw people through the lens of their need for him. He saw people as individuals made in the image of God who he could reveal his Father's love. His mission was to reveal God's compassion by setting the captives free and undoing the works of Satan.

We also see that Jesus' compassion led him to care for people by:

- Healing the sick (Matthew 14:14)
- Raising the dead (John 11:35-38)
- Casting out demons (Mark 5:2-19)
- Providing food & physical needs (Mark 8:1-8)

The Holy Spirit empowers believers today to continue Jesus' mission of revealing God's compassion to the Lost by doing good to all people.

Jesus' compassion led him to spend time with the Lost

"While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: I

desire compassion, not sacrifice. For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.” - Matthew 9:10-17

Jesus understood that you can't reach people unless you love them and spend intentional time with them. His compassion led him to go to places where people wouldn't go, to reach people that were considered unreachable. This didn't mean that he approved of or excused sinful behavior (John 8:10-11). Jesus showed compassion while at the same time calling for repentance and righteousness living (Matthew 5).

If we are to follow Jesus' example of compassion for the Lost, we must be willing to reflect his compassion to those considered unlovable and unreachable through intentionally spending time with them, while at the same time not participating in unrighteous behavior.

Representing God's compassion for the Lost

“But when he (Jesus) saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to his disciples, the harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore, pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” - Matthew 9:35-38

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his one and only Son. That whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.” - John 3:16-17

Our desires are to be shaped by God's desires. We see that God's desire is that lost people come into a relationship with him. His compassion is being extended toward the lost in the hopes that they will come to him the giver of life. Since we were all at one time “lost” and have received grace and mercy, we can extend God's compassion to those that don't know him. This is part of what Jesus means when he says that we are to “let our light shine before men” (Matthew 5:16).

“Letting our light shine” are those good works done through the Holy Spirit that reveal the character of God. It could be a word of encouragement, an act of kindness, sharing the Gospel, etc.

We must look at lost people that we interact with as not just random encounters, but as possible divine appointments for God to reveal himself to. He is truly sending us out into his harvest to reap people to become part of his family and receive him as their Good Shepherd.

Closing Thoughts

- Pray that the Holy Spirit would give us a heart of compassion for the lost and those far from God
- Be willing to respond to the Holy Spirit as he leads us to share his compassion with the Lost