

YE MUST BE BORN AGAIN

and Other Sermons

by

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SERMON THREE

COMPASSION

(Matthew 9: 35-10: 8)

FOR the purpose of clarifying the discussion, let us think of the term in its meaning, in its makeup, in its method.

I. The Meaning of Compassion

The word “**compassion**” is a Latin derivative. “*Sympathy*” is its Greek form. The word “*com*” means “*with*.” The word “*passion*” means “*to suffer*.” Thus the meaning of the term compassion is “*to suffer with*.”

It is a common feeling in the secular world. Everyone has experienced it. When you bend over the body of a sick child tossing in fever and delirium with pain delineated in every twisting movement of the body, and wish that you could take the suffering of the child in your own flesh, you are moved by compassion. When you sit by the side of a wife who has been bereaved by the loss of her husband, whose heart is aching and breaking, whose mind is in a turmoil of worry and fear over an uncertain future; when you long to share at least part of the pain of that burdened soul, you are moved with compassion.

Spiritually, it is more exalted. When you think of the multitudes without God, without Christ, without hope, traveling on the road to an eternal destruction, seemingly heedless and unaware of their desperate plight, and yearn to give your life in the toil and effort of winning them for Christ, you are motivated by compassion.

The Bible is full of illustrations of compassion. Abraham is an example of that. Who can read the eighteenth chapter of Genesis and once more hear the intercessory cries of that burning hearted man without realizing the depths of his concern for Sodom and Gomorrah! Moses is another Old Testament illustration of that grace. You recall the mighty story. Forty wondrous days and nights he had spent in communion with God. His heart was aflame, his soul athrill, his life impassioned by that holy fellowship. Carrying the tables of stone clasped to his heart, he made his way down the mountainside, only to see his people desecrating themselves in the mad worship of the golden calf. You recall how in a passion of fury he broke the tables; how he sent the Levites into the camp to destroy three thousand of the ringleaders.

Yet the very next day this same Moses was on his face before God crying, **“Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet, now, if Thou wilt forgive their sin—; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which Thou hast written.”**

The Lord has told Moses that He would destroy the Jews and make a race out of his own descendants. Had he been a modern sort of Christian, he might have said, “God bless me, my wife, my son John, his wife, us four, and the rest of them can just go on any way they want to.” But no, this man’s heart was burning, yearning, longing, for the salvation of his people. Jesus, Himself, gave proof of His compassion when He wept over the city of Jerusalem that the next day was to nail Him to a cross; when He hung on the cross and cried, **“Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”** Paul was moved with strong desires for the salvation of his people. Nothing but a passionate broken-heartedness could have moved him to protest, **“I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ I for my brethren, my kinsmen, according to the flesh.”**

Church history is full of examples of men and I women and even children, who gave all that they were and had for the salvation of those about them. It was John Knox, the agony of whose soul was expressed I in the cry, “Lord, give me Scotland or I die.” There was George Whitefield, whose travail for the souls of men found passionate voice in the mighty appeal, “Lord, give me souls or take my soul.”

Who that has ever heard or read the story of John and Mary Welch, the daughter and son-in-law of John Knox, can forget its moving details? You will recall that John was a sickly, anemic, consumptive, non-conformist preacher in the time of James of Scotland, when the Catholic Church ruled the land. John had been imprisoned for preaching the gospel. The filth, the darkness, the dampness, of his underground cell, robbed him of what little health he had, so that he almost died. Time and again Mary appealed to the king for his release, only to be refused.

One day, in her desperation, she threw herself on her knees in front of the king as he was riding through the palace park. The king reined in his horse and asked her what she wanted. Once more she told him the pathetic plight of her husband and begged for his discharge from prison. After studying a moment, the king made her an offer. “Woman,” he said, “if you will promise that your husband will never preach again, I will open the doors of his cell at once.”

Mary arose to her feet. Lifting her apron, she threw back her head and looked fully and fearlessly into James’s face.

“Your Majesty,” she cried, “I had rather have the head of my husband in this apron than to make any such promise.”

Moved by the intensity of the woman, the king released John into her custody. She took him back to their home in the Scottish highlands and carefully, gently, lovingly nursed him back to health. He began to preach once more, keeping one jump ahead of the police and the dragoons. One night the two found themselves hidden in a small highland cottage. It was a freezingly cold night. They had gone to bed early.

In the middle of the night, Mary awoke to find her husband's side of the bed empty and cold. She heard a motion on the floor and looked down. There was John stretched out on that frozen earth floor, wrapped in a spread, weeping and groaning in prayer. She urged him to return to bed for fear of catching a bad cold. He said something to her which she took as a sign of assent and fell asleep once more. The morning sun woke her up. John was still on the floor, deep in agonizing prayer. She bent down and touched his shoulder, urging him to get under the covers to warm up.

He lifted his twisted, tear-stained face to her and said, "O woman, let me alone. I have three thousand souls on my heart this night, and I know not how it is with many of them." That, brethren and sisters, is compassion—the burning, yearning, driving, longing, constraining desire for the souls of men.

II. The Makeup of Compassion

What goes in to make up compassion? What are the elements of compassion? As we plumb the depths of the word, as we consider the examples, the attitudes, the actions of those who gave their lives for the souls of their fellow-men, there are three things that build up that virtue.

First, *there is the woe of sin, its presence, its power, its penalties, its distress, its desolation, its degradation, its destruction.*

No man with a spark of human kindness in his soul can contemplate unmoved the ravages of sin. Look about you; see what sin has done; see what it is doing. There is nothing sacred to it.

- It has debauched our youth and demoralized our old.
- It has destroyed our politics, disgraced our economics, debased our society.
- It has robbed us of virtue, of decency, of purity, or morality.
- It has taken the sweetest and dearest and the noblest among us and defiled them with the trademark of Satan.
- It has broken up our homes, violated our marriage ties, disrupted every vestige of filial affection.

Those who fall within its power are helplessly enmeshed and ensnared by it. Without outside intervention and aid they are sure to succumb to its power and perish beneath its penalties. The woe of the sinner should call out the yearning compassion in the heart of the saint.

Second, *the worth of the soul is another element.*

How much is the soul, any soul worth? We spend all sorts of time, of money, of effort, of energy on our bodies. We travail for the development of our minds. How much do we do for our souls? Fathers and mothers sacrifice all that they are and have in order to give their children strong, healthy bodies, and efficient, educated, trained minds. There is no price too high to pay, seemingly, for the care of the physical and mental needs of the people who make up our great nation. Yet how little attention, how little effort, how little money, is given, is put forth, is paid, for the cultivation, aye, for the salvation of the souls of myriad thousands lost in sin!

It should not be that way.

When these bodies and minds have gone on into the limbo of forgotten things our souls and the souls of those about us, will go on living and serving in God's heaven or, God forbid, tormented forever in the burnings of an endless hell. How much is the soul worth?

When I was a student in the Seminary, one of my professors one day, in a chapel service, told a story of his own experience. He told of how one wintertime his seven year old girl contracted pneumonia and was brought to the point of death. He told of the doctors, of the specialists, of the nurses, of the medicines that were procured in a seemingly hopeless effort to save the child's life. He told of how one terrible late afternoon the family physician came out of the room of the child and, putting his arm around the father, told him that the child would not live.

The father went into the bedroom and sat down by the side of the bed. His wife was on the other side, her face gaunt, her eyes red-rimmed from watching and weeping. The minutes moved along. The child, with the disease traveling to her heart, began to twist and turn, to push and to pull at her covers. The father, realizing that she was in the throes of death, turned to his wife and told her what the doctor had said. The mother began to cry, but the father remonstrated with her.

"This is no time for tears, Mother," he said, "this is time for prayer. Let us pray. God is merciful. He will save our child."

The pair knelt by the bed of their darling. The mother began to pray but broke down in strong weeping. The father lifted his voice in prayer. Right there in that chapel that professor repeated his prayer. Never so long as I live will I forget the pathos of that cry.

"Lord," he prayed, "our hope is in Thee. The doctors can do no more. We can do no more. Our faith and confidence are in Thee. Lord, You can take every penny we have in the world. You can take every bit of property we have on earth. You can take me; you can take my wife; you can take us both, only spare our child."

God heard and answered that prayer. The child is alive today, married to a preacher, with precious, blessed children of her own. Think of it. If that child would have died, by the Word of God, by the blood of Christ, it would have gone on to glory. Only its body and its little life were at stake. Yet the father and mother offered all they were and had for the sparing of their child's life. All about us are men and women and children whose souls are perishing. Should we not be willing to give our property, to give our money, to give ourselves to save them from a burning hell?

Third, *the work of the saint is a third part of compassion.*

The Lord has entrusted to us the stewardship, the ministry, the preaching of the gospel. Whose soever sins we remit, they are remitted unto them, and whose soever sins we retain, they are retained unto them. What a fearful responsibility! To think that we as children of God have the keys to heaven.

Over and over again we are told that God and His Christ and the Holy Spirit are depending on us for the promulgation of the Word.

We are responsible to God first and to the souls of our fellowmen next under this trusteeship. We are the middlemen between the Saviour and the sinner. Someday, at the bar of God, we shall have to give an accounting of all this matter. Hungry-hearted, thirsty-souled, empty-lived men, women, and children, are looking to us and depending on us to lead them to the bread and water of life. Will we measure up to our responsibility?

III. The Method of Compassion

What will compassion lead us to do? In what practices will it constrain us to engage?

First, *there will be clean, holy living, fearless personal dedication and devotion to the Lord's service.* Our lives must be crystal pure, clean, acceptable, witnessing to our saving experience and knowledge of the Son of God. Men watching us must come to recognize and to realize that we have been with Jesus; that we have something they do not have; that our lives have gone through a transfiguration and a transformation that cannot be obtained through the ordinary course of culture and cultivation. We must shine for Jesus.

Second, *there will be the incessant program of intercessory prayer.* Compassion will drive us to our knees, to our faces before God, by day and by night, in unceasing supplication at the throne of grace for God's mercy upon those in sin.

- There has never been a compassionate-hearted Christian who was not mighty in prayer.
- There has never been a persistence in prayer that was not honored and answered by God.

We may have to pray for months, even for years, for the salvation of those in whose souls we are concerned. Sometime, somewhere, somehow, God will hear and answer. There must be no cessation, there must be no letting-up, there must be no giving-up. We worship a prayer answering God. His honor is engaged in giving heed to our supplications. His Word has gone out to the ends of the earth, that He will grant the petitions of His children.

Third, *there will be just as concentrated visiting and witnessing.* Even as Jesus Christ traveled from place to place, touching the souls of men, even as Paul, the apostle, spent the greatest portion of his time in personal appeal; even so will we also give ourselves to the task of bringing Christ to our fellowmen, in their homes, in their business places, wherever they may forgather. Thus and thus alone can we hope to carry out the mission with which the Lord Jesus Christ has entrusted us.

When I was pastor of a certain little church, there was in my membership a great Christian woman somewhere in the fifties. She was married and had two children. Her oldest girl was a Christian, who lived with her husband in another town. The twenty-four year old son lived at home. The father and son were both unsaved.

The father was one of the most wicked, and vile men I had ever known. He never came to church. He abused his wife, misused his children, drank, gambled, committed adultery. He made life a hell for his wife. He made it hard for her to serve the Lord, to come to church, yet that dear woman kept on for Christ, taking all the bitter cursing and brutality of her husband in a meek, humble, patient spirit. The boy came to church almost every Sunday but remained unsaved. Time after time the preacher plead with him to give his heart to Christ, but seemingly to no avail.

One night a missionary preached in the church. At the end of his sermon, he turned over the invitation to me. I called the people to their feet and announced an invitation hymn. The chairman of the board of deacons was standing in front of this woman's son. Turning to him, he placed his hand on the boy's hand and urged him to make his decision for Christ. The boy started down the aisle. The people, knowing of the agony in that mothers' heart, began to weep. Eight others followed that boy that night to Christ and into the church. The mother was not there that service.

The next day I left for a revival in Louisiana to be gone for two weeks. I came back, preached Sunday morning, and at the end of the service stood in the door to shake hands with the people as they filed out. The mother approached. Claspng my hand in both of hers, she pressed it as hard as she could and wept, "O preacher, God surely does answer prayer." Yes, beloved, God does answer prayer. The last man that I baptized as a pastor of a church before I accepted the position of State evangelist, was the husband of that woman. God had heard and honored her consecrated, devoted, prayerful, patient, humble life.

Beloved, this is what compassion will lead us to do. With all of our hearts; with all of our souls, with all our lives, we shall serve God. Regardless of pain, of toil, of persecution, of sacrifice, we shall serve Christ, be loyal to the church, strive to win the lost. We worship a merciful heavenly Father. Our prayers will move, our tears will constrain, our zeal will incline Him toward us. He will hear from heaven, answer our prayers, honor our efforts, glorify His Son, build up the kingdom, overcome Satan, save the lost.

"And when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion on them . . ."

~ end of sermon 3 ~

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