

Sermon Outline

“Compassion,” What Christmas Creates, Part 3 – Psalm 103:8-14 – Joshua Harris – December 16, 2012

I. Introduction

- A. When we talk about “What Christmas Creates” we’re talking about something more than merely a “holiday spirit” or short-term change around a season of the year.
- B. We’re talking about how the reality of the birth of Jesus Christ changes us. We’re talking about how truth about God and his mighty acts touch our real lives. We’re talking about how the person and work of the powerful, God-man, Jesus Christ, transforms us.

II. What is compassion?

- A. The Bible tells us that God is love (1 John 4:8). Compassion is an important expression of God’s character. In Exodus 22:27 God says that when people are treated unjustly and they cry to him, “I will hear, for I am compassionate.” In the Bible, God’s compassion is most powerfully shown in his loving choice to withhold judgment on the guilty and instead show mercy.

“Their heart was not steadfast toward him; they were not faithful to his covenant. Yet he, being compassionate, atoned for their iniquity and did not destroy them; he restrained his anger often and did not stir up all his wrath.” (Psalm 78:37-38)

“For a brief moment I deserted you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing anger for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you,” says the LORD, your Redeemer.” (Isaiah 54:7-8)

- B. God’s compassion is rooted in his everlasting love. Instead of judgment and anger, God forgives and redeems. Instead of rejection God gathers his people to himself. He draws them into right relationship.

“The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always chide, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us. As a father shows compassion to his children, so the LORD shows compassion to those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.” (Psalm 103:8-14)

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- C. He removes our transgressions from us. He doesn't treat us as our sins deserves. He remembers how weak we are. He shows compassion to us like a father who shows compassion to his kids. There's an identification and bond with our children that enables us to extend an extra measure of grace. God calls us his children. He acts to save us and comes to us.

III. How does the incarnation reveal God's compassion?

- A. If compassion involves identification and drawing near, then we can say that the birth of Jesus Christ is the ultimate expression of compassion. John 1:14 says that Jesus, who is the eternal Son of God, took on flesh and made his dwelling among us. In Christ, God identified with us in the most powerful way imaginable. He became one of us. He took on our weakness.
- B. Psalm 103 says that God remembers that we are dust. In the incarnation, God the Son knows personally what it means to be dust—he joins us in our "dusthood," in our humanity. Compassion is the ability and willingness to put yourself in the shoes of someone else. To feel what they feel. To hurt with them. To leave behind your own comfort and enter into their world.
- C. In the incarnation Jesus showed God's loving compassion towards his people by entering into our existence. By owning our pain as his own.

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need". (Hebrews 4:14-16 ESV)

- D. Jesus, our high priest who advocates for us before the Father, is able to sympathize with our weakness. Through the birth of Jesus all of God's promises of compassion and mercy and redemption are fulfilled. This is why the angels rejoiced. It's why the shepherds were filled with great joy. It's why Mary sang her song of praise. In Jesus, God has kept his promises.

IV. How should we be compassionate?

- A. The love and compassion that God has shown us in the giving of his Son must shape the way we live and relate to others. 1 John 3:16 says, "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers."

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- B. The love of Jesus for us in the giving of his life defines love. And as his disciples we follow his pattern of love. We imitate him. As he has loved us we are called to love fellow believers. We see this pattern in the Bible over and over again. God's love is to shape our love. His forgiveness is to shape our forgiveness of others. His compassion towards us is to shape a heart of compassion towards others.
1. How can we be indifferent towards the hurting when our Savior came to our rescue?
 2. How can we distance ourselves from the pain of others when our Savior willingly entered into our suffering?

Fellowship Starters

1. Take time as a Care Group to read: Psalm 103:8-14 and Hebrews 4:14-16
2. Is there a particular person or group that you currently struggle to show compassion to? Why?
3. How does Jesus Christ's compassion toward you help you cultivate compassion toward this person or group? What practical steps can you take toward showing Christ' compassion for this person or group?
4. What is one way I can actively demonstrate Christ-imitating, Christ-motivated compassion to others?
5. How does it make you feel knowing that we have a high priest who is able to sympathize with our weaknesses, in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin? How does the incarnation shape the way that you show compassion to others?