

Lesson 12: The Compassion Of Our King **Matthew 4:23-25**

Memory Verse: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8).

Text: “And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people. Then His fame went throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all sick people who are afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and paralytics; and He healed them. Great multitudes followed Him -- from Galilee, and from Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan.

Monday

This week we come to Matthew chapter 4 verses 23-25, which describes for us the compassionate ministry of our King.

A few years ago in 2001, there was a young 13 year old girl named Kayleen sitting in an evening church service. She had been praying with her family about information they received through the church from the Voice of the Martyrs ministry. They had heard about a young boy from Sudan by the name of James Jeda, who had been tortured with fire because he refused to convert to Islam. Jeda had watched his parents and siblings killed by Islamic Sudanese for failing to convert and still he refused to convert or be swayed from his faith in Christ. Kayleen was burdened; she wanted to do something that would make a difference, but what could a thirteen year old girl do and what could she give.

The pastor was talking about the plight of Sudanese Christians, because the church was getting ready to send a short term missionary to that country. Sudan has been torn apart by civil war since the early 1960's. For over 40 years the country has suffered terribly. Children have had to dig foxholes outside of their schools and classrooms to hide in, because the schools are often the targets of bombing raids, as are the hospitals and churches. Approximately half of Sudan is in the Sahara, the temperatures can get below freezing at night; and due to the lack of blankets and constant exposure, poor health rages across the country. Moreover, though much of the land is rich for farming in the south, food is scarce as army raids often confiscate what is grown or bombs are used to destroy fields and crops. Starvation is a big problem there. Because of the war, many missionary groups in other countries have stopped sending people to Sudan. Bibles and Christian literature are in short supply and worst of all, there is utterly terrible persecution against Sudanese Christians.

Suddenly Kayleen, as she sat in her pew felt a tug of hope in her heart. She looked at the youth Bible she held in her hands with all of the doodles and notes she had made since she received it as a Christmas present three years earlier. After the service she took it to the man in the church who was going on the mission trip and said, “Please give it to somebody special.”

When the man arrived in Sudan with Kayleen’s Bible, he spent days handing out provisions and other supplies to needy Sudanese. His heart went out to all those he met, and yet as the days of their trip were coming to a close, he felt a special attachment to one young man who bore the scars of being thrown into a fire by a Muslim raiding party. He was now living with his grandmother and attending a makeshift school hoping to grow up and be a teacher. He did not have a Bible and the man gave him Kayleen’s with some special words of encouragement. He got back to the states and told her what had happened. Kayleen asked what the young man’s name was and he said it was James Jeda, the very same young man she was praying for before the mission trip took place. A coincidence? No. A miracle? Yes. God had answered her prayer and used her in a wonderful personal way to make a difference.

The kind of compassion that Kayleen showed toward those in need, to give of herself, is the kind of compassion that is born in the hearts of all who truly follow Christ, because that is exactly the kind of compassion that Christ had and does have towards others. In our text today, we see the description of the Lord’s ministry throughout the region of Galilee. It was a ministry of love, practically reaching out and meeting the needs of those around Him. This is the kind of ministry that we need to have, as well, with all whom God brings in our path, a ministry of compassion that is ready to meet the practical needs of others that they might also believe the message of the Gospel.

What regular ministry can you become involved in to show love and compassion toward others?

How can you become personally involved in missions and in blessing our fellow brothers and sisters suffering around the world? _____

Tuesday

The primary concern of the Lord Jesus was to bring the Gospel of the Kingdom to the people all around Him. As you know, “Gospel” means good news, and Jesus was spreading the good news that salvation and entrance into the kingdom of God was available to those who repented of their sins and followed Him in faith. There are three primary ways seen in this text that the Lord Jesus brought His message to the people:

1. His gospel came in word (v.23). Verse 23 tells us that Jesus “went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom....” This shows us the heart of Jesus’ ministry. He was first and foremost concerned with meeting the deepest needs of men and

women, and those are the needs of the spirit. The greatest need of any person is to hear the Gospel and to be taught the Gospel, to have it explained so that he might be healed spiritually.

The word “teaching” in verse 23 means simply to pass on information. It is focused on content, with the express purpose of discovering truth. So the Lord went into the people’s synagogues and invested Himself in sitting down and teaching them. The second term that shows the gospel coming to the people is the word “preaching.” This word comes from the root term “to herald.” It means to cry out, to proclaim, to preach in the sense of proclaiming and calling the people to faith. And whereas teaching involves explaining as you would in a more formal setting, like a classroom, preaching involves simply announcing the message and calling the people to believe. These two things, teaching and preaching, were the central activities of Jesus’ daily ministry. Everything else He did, healing, casting out spirits, etc., was all done to support and to undergird the message that He was proclaiming.

Now Beloved, there is a very important lesson in this for us: it is impossible for you to show real compassion and true love for another person, if you don’t make it a priority to simply announce and to teach them the truth of the Gospel.

I had the misfortune once to hear of a missionary, a medical doctor, who had spent over 20 years of his life on the mission field in Africa. He came home to retire in the United States and got up to speak during his own retirement banquet being held in a Cooperative Baptist Fellowship church. The former missionary stood up and actually boasted to the audience that in 20 years on the mission field as a medical doctor he had never shared the Gospel one single time with anyone.

He took that as a badge of honor, a proof of his “tolerance.” But in truth, it was a fearful and terrible thing, that he would spend his life having only a pretense of compassion and a pretense of love, never caring about people enough to actually reach out to them and touch them at a point of their greatest need. Added to this fear, the audience of mostly college professors actually applauded the man. I for one would hate to have to stand before God and account for over 20 years of such terrible, wasted stewardship. I don’t envy a man like that. But unfortunately, his situation isn’t that abnormal. It is abnormal for an international missionary to be sure, but it isn’t that strange for the average Christian living day-to-day in this country to live 20 years without sharing the Gospel.

Have you ever heard someone say, “I practice lifestyle evangelism. I just try to live out the Gospel in front of people.” That’s one of those statements where you just want to respond, “Well bless your little heart.” And I do mean “**little heart.**” (For those of you who might not be aware, “bless your heart,” is a southern code for “what a sweet little idiot you are.”) Yes, it is true that we must live out the Gospel in front of others. Yes, it is true that we must protect a good name and testimony, and we must show compassion by serving others, but it cannot stop there. It must not stop there, because Romans 10:17 says “...faith comes by **hearing**, and hearing by the word of God. And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall

they hear without a preacher?” (Rom.10:14)

When in your heart you know you should reach out to someone else and you know you should do something, let your gut reaction be the same as Kayleen’s. Reach out by giving the word of God. Start there; start there even if you are ministering to other believers, for the sake of encouragement. And if you are not praying for and making specific intentional efforts to speak and to share the Gospel of Christ with your unbelieving friends and acquaintances, then you are not practicing evangelism of any kind. Don’t fool yourself. You are not acting out of real love for them, and you are not moving and living with the compassion of Christ. His gospel came in word.

What is wrong with simply meeting a person’s physical needs, but never speaking the truth to that person? _____

How can you be involved in actively ministering God’s word to others? Do you have to be a teacher or preacher to do this? _____

Wednesday

Not only did the Gospel come in word, we see from the text a second way:

2. His gospel come with power (v.23). Verse 23 says that he healed all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people. Verse 24 says again that He healed those with various diseases and torments and then lists three specific kinds of categories of problems that He healed.

Some people are sick and unhealthy because of their own foolish habits. Others suffer as a direct consequence of their sin. God sometimes uses physical affliction to discipline His people. Many of the Corinthian Christians were weak, sick and had even died because they profaned the Lord’s Supper. And yet Scripture makes it abundantly clear that not all suffering and sickness are caused by sin, ignorance, errors in judgment or God’s discipline. Job, for example, suffered greatly precisely because he was blameless, upright, feared God and turned away from evil. When Jesus’ disciples assumed that the man, who was born blind, was being punished either for his own sin or that of his parents, Jesus corrected them saying, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him” (John 9:1-3).

Jesus’ healing of all these sicknesses, no matter what their cause, was given as a divine

verification of His message. In fact on one occasion, He even said, “If you do not believe on account of my words, believe on account of the works.” His words should have been sufficient evidence of His messiahship, and they were for many that believed. But Jesus’ healing ministry was a powerful addition to the message He was preaching and teaching.

Think about the magnitude of this ministry. It says in Matthew 4:24 that His fame went throughout all Syria. They brought Him all the sick people and He healed them. Great multitudes followed Him. Alexander MacLaren said this about the scope of Christ’s healing hinted at in these verses, “It may be doubted whether we have an adequate notion of the immense number Christ’s miracles. Those recorded are but a small portion of those done. Those early ones were illustrations of the nature of His kingdom; they were His first gifts to His kingdom subjects.” The book of Hebrews says of the gospel of the kingdom that “which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him, God also bearing witness both with signs and wonders, with various miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will?” (Heb. 2:3-4). This multitude of miracles, then, were a foretaste of His glorious kingdom. They were given to verify His identity and give us some idea of the glory and majesty of His kingdom in which the gifts of His compassion and grace will be multiplied ten-thousand fold.

The testimony of the Bible as to the actual magnitude of the Lord’s healing ministry is amazing, Beloved. The great reformed theologian B.B. Warfield has this to say about it, “When our Lord came down to earth He drew heaven with Him. The signs which accompanied His ministry were but the trailing clouds of glory which He brought from heaven, which is His home. The number of the miracles which He wrought may easily be underrated. It has been said that in effect he banished disease and death from Palestine for the three years of His ministry....” The Lord’s miracles took place out in the open air, where all could see. He healed all that were brought to Him, believers and unbelievers alike, faithful and unfaithful alike, without discrimination, all that came to Him. The magnitude of this ministry is easily missed. Just imagine all the sick people in Georgia and Florida being healed, no matter who they were. Doctors, nurses and pharmacists would be out of work. Hospitals would emptied all across the land. That is what was going on here – people flooding from everywhere, all of the sick being healed.

Which is worse in your opinion and why: to be physically ill, or to be spiritually sick? _____

How might God use sickness, pain, or difficulty to bring about good in a person’s life? _____

In times of sickness, why do we often pray or seek spiritual help only as a last resort? _____

Thursday

I think it's beneficial for us to spend a little more time today, talking about how the Lord's message came with power. Look at the three examples of things that Christ healed in verse 24. It says that He healed those who were demon-possessed. It is clear from Scripture that many physical and mental afflictions and other problems that people face are caused directly by Satan through the actions of his demonic forces. These are spiritual problems at heart and the Lord gave these people spiritual help by casting out the evil spirits. The second group of people that are specifically mentioned as being healed by the Lord are "epileptics," *seleniazō* in the Greek, meaning literally those who are "moonstruck" or those who are "lunatics." The word was commonly used to describe those that were mentally ill, mentally handicapped or who suffered from seizures and convulsions. It was often used to describe those that suffered from epilepsy, which is why it is translated that way here. So the Lord healed these mental disorders [You might note, that this verse proves the ancients were well aware of the difference between these kinds of sicknesses and demon-possession. Oftentimes, people will argue against the testimony of Scripture by saying that the accounts of demon possession sprang from the people's ignorance about things such as mental disease and epilepsy, and they simply ascribed these disorders to demons. But as you can plainly see, they did make a distinction, and Matthew, an eye-witness to the Lord's miracles, could apparently tell the difference as could the other authors of Scripture.]

So the Lord healed both spiritual and mental afflictions. He also healed physical afflictions as we see in the term paralytics. This is a general term in Greek representing a wide range of crippling handicaps. So we see that Matthew uses these terms to encompass the broad areas of people's afflictions: spiritual, mental and nervous, and physical. The lesson for us is plain, not only does Jesus meet the deepest needs of our lives through His teachings and the Gospel message, we also see that Jesus has the power over all of the difficulties that men may ever have. That is just as true today as it was then. The Lord still has the power to heal in all of these areas, and if it is His desire to do so, He can do it

I know that in my life I have seen many people healed. I recall one friend, Scott Buroughsfield, who was an unbeliever diagnosed with a life-threatening cancer. He was broken over sin, went to church and cried out to the Lord for salvation and mercy. He also asked for God to heal him, if he was willing, was baptized, and the next several times he went to the doctors they said he was cancer free. Test after test showed the cancer was simply gone. The doctors couldn't explain it; they said it was a miracle. We could multiply examples like this. Let me say this though, it is not always the Lord's will to heal a person. We also see in Scripture the Lord refusing to heal, and in fact using sickness and suffering to accomplish wonderful and more valuable things such as the sanctification of the believer and the increase of their dependence on grace, as in the case

of Paul.

So we must recognize that God is sovereign over the use of His own power, whether to heal or not heal. Our place and our responsibility is to pray in faith asking for God’s healing hand, if He is willing. But remember that it is also our place and our responsibility to submit to His decision after we have committed the matter to prayer.

There was a very special purpose for the tremendous outpouring of the Lord’s healing power at the place and time recorded in Matthew. As I said earlier, it was to verify the truth of His message and to demonstrate His divinity. Jesus did not heal through prayer but directly with a word or a touch by His own authority. He said, “Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me; or else believe Me for the sake of the works themselves” (John 14:11). Second, the miracles showed the true character of God, calling people to trust in His goodness and love. Third, they showed specifically that Jesus was the prophesied Messiah, because the Old Testament, predicted that the Messiah would perform these kinds of miracles. And fourth, the miracles proved that the coming kingdom announced by the Lord was a reality. This tremendous outpouring of God’s grace through miracles was a powerful testimony at the beginning and birth of the church, similar to the great miracles God performed at the birth of the nation of Israel. Further, we can expect such an outpouring of the miraculous again in the time before the Second Coming, when God will usher in the millennial kingdom.

How can you present the Gospel today not only in word but with power also? _____

One answer to that question is that you can have real love for others. You can act toward them, not with the love of the world but with agape love, self-sacrificing love, the love that the Spirit of God teaches and pours out into the hearts of all believers. “By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love toward one another.” Love is a mighty force. It is empowered by God; it also is a kind of miracle, and it is available to all of us today as a way to let the message of the Gospel flow through us. Like the miracles of Jesus, it will undergird and prove the truth of the message we teach and announce by our words.

Friday

Finally, not only do we see that the Lord’s good news, His gospel, came in word and with power, we see a third way that it came:

3. His Gospel came with much assurance (v.23). It is interesting to me that the opposition to Christ never called into question any of the miracles they had witnessed. Some of them were malicious enough to ascribe the miracles He performed to Satan, but even in doing that they were

still confessing the reality and the validity of the miracles themselves. Even as the Lord hung on the cross, they confessed the awesome reality of Christ's power saying, "He saved others...."

Look at the last phrase of verse 23. It says His miracles were done, "among the people." They were done openly. They weren't done in a little corner. There was no machinery, which you find in theaters - no possibility of collusion. They weren't done in a protected place or some amphitheater somewhere, where only certain people could get up to the stage and there was the possibility of fraud.

His message was open and His power so obvious and so great and proven that His fame spread throughout all of Syria in a time before T.V. and telephones. God did things in such a way that people could rest assured in the truth of His message.

You also can present the Gospel with much assurance. That is, you can if you have truly and personally come to know the power of a changed life. Many of us, beloved, lack a testimony and lack assurance precisely because we haven't seen the power of God moving in ourselves. What do I mean by that? We haven't seen the power of holy affections, a compelling love for God and His word, a longing, hungering and thirsting after godliness and righteousness, a compulsion to pray, a heart that responds to the bitterness of life with praise and intercessory prayer. These are the things that are born in the heart of all who truly love and have come to know God. Holy love and affection for the things of God demonstrate a new birth, and allow a person to have an assurance they can effectively communicate.

Many in the church lack assurance because they do not see in themselves anything that is different from the unbelievers all around them. They love the same things; they live in the same way. If that is the case with you, it should be a cause for fear and alarm; it should be a cause for you to examine yourself, to get on your knees and cry out to God, "What wrong with me? Am I even in the faith?"

Do not fear to do so. If you are saved, then the Bible says that the Holy Spirit testifies with our Spirit and reveals to us that we are God's children. He may also reveal other reasons for your struggle, such as sin of which you need to repent. I Peter tells us that this can cause us to doubt our salvation and live spiritually powerless lives. If that is the case, repent and get up off your knees with renewed love to God and a purpose in keeping with repentance. Or, it may be that you will find you have never truly known Jesus and come to Him in faith. If this is the case, then you can also take care of that right now on your knees by crying out to Him in faith and receiving Him as you Lord and Savior. Then, you also can get up, live in compassion and love towards those around you, and bring the Gospel to them with much assurance.

Do you have assurance in your own heart? Why or why not? _____

How did the Gospel come with power in your own life? _____
