



Psalm 103:1-12
Believe
Compassion

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Today we are continuing the series we've been in for the last several weeks, called "Believe," looking at some of the theological foundations of the Christian faith. Many of you are reading each week in your "Believe" books, which help to dive into each week's topic even deeper, with more Bible passages pertaining to each week's topic. 55 of those books have been purchased, and I know there are a few of them still at the Info Center. So that will feed you spiritually...and then many of you ordered the Rose Hill Cook books (available at the Info Center), and so that will fill you physically. We got you covered here at Rose Hill! To get even more spiritual nourishment, some of you are doing more study on your own or in your small groups – I was contacted by a small group just this past week wanting to know how they could get a study guide for their group to use. And then the children and the youth are also going through "Believe" and are studying the same passages and topics each week that we are here in the sermons. So there are a number of ways through which God is working to shape our understanding of some of the core beliefs of the Christian faith.

Today's topic is one that flows right out of last week's, in which explored the theology of humanity. And the foundation for our theology of humanity comes straight from Genesis 1, where we see that God creates humans in His image. There's a special connection between people and our Creator that no other aspect of Creation has, and this shapes our approach to people, our response to their predicaments and their pain.

So this morning, we take it a little further, and we can summarize the theological belief we're looking at today with this statement: **"I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to people in need."** Christians are *called* to show compassion to people in need, because it flows out of our relationship with God, who has shown compassion to us in *our* time of need. This morning's passage from Psalm 103 makes this very clear:

**Praise the Lord, my soul;
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.
Praise the Lord, my soul,
and forget not all his benefits—
who forgives all your sins
and heals all your diseases,
who redeems your life from the pit
and crowns you with love and compassion...
The Lord is compassionate and gracious,
slow to anger, abounding in love.
As a father has compassion on his children,
so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him (Psalm 103:1-4, 9, 13).**

God is compassionate. We see it in this passage and throughout Scripture. Now, a big piece of compassion is simply listening to people. The Scriptures tell us over and over that God listens to us. He hears our prayers. Jesus listened to people. He patiently listened to people tell their stories about why they were the way they were, what their challenges were, what their hopes were for the future, and then he had compassion on them. **So compassion begins with listening for the purpose of understanding the other person.** When we don't listen to others – and by “listening” I mean seeking to understand their perspective and enter into their story – when we don't do that, it's hard to have compassion. In fact compassion means “with suffering.” So to have compassion on someone or for someone, is to suffer with them...to enter into their experience of life and be in it with them. And that starts by truly listening.

The story is told about a Drug Enforcement Agent who stopped at a farm. He said to the farm owner “I need to inspect your farm for illegal growing drugs.” The farm owner said “Okay, but don't go in that field over there.”

The DEA officer verbally exploded saying, “Mister, I have the authority of the Federal Government with me!” Reaching into his rear pants pocket, the arrogant officer removed his badge and shoved it in the farmer's face. “See this badge?! This badge means I am allowed to go wherever I wish...On any land !! No questions asked or answers given!! Have I made myself clear? Do you understand?!!”

The farmer nodded politely, apologized, and went about his chores. A short time later, the farmer heard loud screams coming from one of the fields. He looked up, and saw the DEA officer running for his life, being chased by the farmer's big, mean bull. With every step the bull was gaining ground on the officer, and it seemed likely that he'd get gored by the bull before he reached safety. The officer was clearly terrified.

The farmer threw down his tools, ran to the fence and yelled at the top of his lungs: “Your badge, show him your **BADGE!!**”

It's not really an illustration of compassion...but it's an illustration of listening. Or, of not listening. **Letting our own pride get in the way prevents us from truly hearing someone else's experience of life.** So when we listen to others to understand their perspective, to understand where they're coming from, we are then able to have compassion. And in a situation like in a marriage, it's vital that both husband and wife listen to each other – this isn't always a one-way street – and be allowed the safety of sharing openly and honestly. And then there is able to be mutual understanding and mutual compassion.

In the gospels, Jesus has compassion on people many times. The word, “Compassion” is

explicitly used several times, and it's implied in others. And frequently, Jesus takes the time to listen to people's stories prior to demonstrating his compassion. So compassion begins with listening for the purpose of understanding the other person's situation in life.

And as Christians, as people who follow Jesus and seek to be Christ-like in our living, we are *called* to be compassionate. But here's the thing: Compassion is one of those human traits that many, many people express, regardless of their relationship with God (along with love, joy, peace, etc.). And this should come as no surprise, because, as we saw last week: All people are created in God's image. If God is compassionate, then as His image-bearers, we humans have the capability to be compassionate as well. Christians don't have the corner on the market when it comes to image-bearing.

So, with that in mind, I want to do something a little different this morning. I want to share with you some stories that are inspiring stories of compassion. And other than one of them, I don't know if these are stories of Christians showing compassion. One of these I've had in my files for over a year waiting for the right time to share; the other two came my way just this week. I wasn't looking for them – it was as if God said, “I know what you're preaching on this week. Here are two stories I'm dropping in your lap to help get the message across.”

The first is about Alex Cora, the manager of the Boston Red Sox. They're the next-to-last team I'd like to see win the World Series, but I'm cheering for them this year because of this man. When Alex Cora was being courted by the Red Sox organization to be their manager about a year ago, he had an unusual request for his contract. You see, Alex is from Puerto Rico. His family still lives there. And on September 6, 2017 Hurricane Irma struck Puerto Rico. Two weeks later Hurricane Maria struck as well. And Alex Cora's negotiations with the Red Sox were taking place almost at that exact same time – He was announced as their new manager on October 22, 2017. And in his contract negotiations, rather than asking for more money – and the contract he signed is one of the five lowest annual salaries for Major League Baseball Managers, so he certainly could have asked for more – **Instead of asking for more money, he asked the Red Sox organization to help with relief efforts in Puerto Rico.** Specifically, to fly a cargo plane full of supplies.

The Boston Globe reported: “The Red Sox used the La Mesa Sports Complex (**Picture**), an open-air basketball court with a corrugated roof that still has a toppled tree breaking through it, to distribute supplies and cheer the locals... Several JetBlue cargo jets have delivered almost 10 tons of supplies to Puerto Rico. Tuesday's flight included medical supplies, water filtration systems, first aid kits, flashlights, diapers, food, and water.” Besides Alex, a number of Red Sox players and other staff made trips down to help distribute supplies



and help the people.

“The players who made the trip were genuinely moved, with [star pitcher Chris] Sale calling the effects of the devastation “chilling.” “You can look at the news and you can look at the pictures,” he said, “but once you get here in person, it’s a different story. People down here are hurting, and any help we can bring them is great.” You see, that is pure compassion, giving help to people in need. It started with one guy, filled with compassion, and then he enlisted others who got down and dirty and with the people in their suffering.

The second story comes to us from China. It’s about a Chinese actor, who’s an A-list actor there but at least by name would be unknown probably to most all of us. His name is Chow Yun-fat (**Picture**). If you’ve seen “Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon” then you’ve seen at least one movie he’s starred in. Through his acting and other endeavors, he’s become pretty wealthy – to the tune of about \$714 million (U.S.). He can afford to live however he wants and do pretty much whatever he wants. If he’d wanted to, he could’ve bought the 1962 Ferrari that a Redmond man sold recently via Sotheby’s auction house for a record \$48 million.ⁱⁱ But that’s not how he rolls. Instead, even as he lives in Hong Kong, one of the most expensive cities in the world to live in, he manages to live on just over \$100 per month. Now, the articles I found on this didn’t dive into what’s included in that – like rent or mortgage or utilities, and so forth. But a little light was shed on his lifestyle. For instance, one articleⁱⁱⁱ says that he “...manages to live so frugally in one of the world’s most expensive cities by frequenting street food stalls and rarely buying new things...For example, for 17 years, Chow stuck with his trusty Nokia flip phone, only recently purchasing a new smartphone when his old device finally stopped working.”



“Chow is often seen riding public transportation where he [wears] a simple wardrobe — a shirt costing him 98 yuan (\$14) and sandals costing another 15 yuan (\$2).

“When he’s not exercising, [cleaning up the streets of Hong Kong after a typhoon](#), or [lining up for tickets to see his own movie](#), Chow spends his free time doing charity work. Chow and his wife have no children. He has said that when he dies [he will donate his entire fortune to charity](#).”

When he leaves this earth, he’s donating all his money to charity, through a foundation he’s established, to help needy people. He sees a need, he has undoubtedly listened to stories about the need and seen the realities, and he has compassion, leaving his entire fortune. And he’s living in such a way that his fortune is being maximized, rather than

minimized.

The last story is one I've had in my files for a bit. It's from a blog post that is titled, "My Date With A Prostitute."^{iv} I won't read the whole thing, but let me share parts of this with you. I'm just going to read it as it is, written in first-person, though this is not my story:

"While in Malaysia in November, I had a weekend to rest and explore the city. I headed out without a plan, other than the goal to take pictures around the city and river... Shortly after sitting on a small bench, a young woman came and sat next to me. I could see from her poorly done makeup and the way she dressed that I was probably a customer to her. I suspected her business was prostitution.

She introduced herself as Anette*. **(Picture)** I told her my name, and as we sat in silence, my heart began to break. My question of, "how are you today?" broke the silence. Although she didn't speak fluent English, she spoke it well enough for small talk... Finally, I asked what she did for work. She explained in broken English that her job was to have sex. When she said this I could tell she was partly ashamed to admit this and also partly wondering if I was interested.



I told her, "I am not a customer; I am a friend."

By looking at her somewhat anorexic figure, I assumed she didn't eat often. So...I offered to buy her lunch. She agreed and I wondered what I had just done! This woman's appearance made it obvious about her trade... what would people think?

As we walked I looked to see the faces turn to watch her. Other women looked at her in a disapproving way, men looked at her and then me as if knowing what was going on.

When we sat down at this riverside restaurant, I could tell from her body language she felt out-of-place. "Have people taken you out to eat before?" I asked. She said, "No, never!" While waiting for our food, I got to know Anette a little better. She is 25 and travels back and forth from the rice fields for work. It's the off-season, however, so she doesn't have any work back at her home. Meaning she has to find an alternative to afford things like food, water, and a place to live.

I asked her a little bit more about her work. She explained, "I don't like my work but what can I do?" The way she said this made it obvious that she didn't want to do this work at all.

But she couldn't figure out another way.

When she locked eyes with me and said, "You are good man," I took the opportunity to share the Gospel with her. I tried my best to explain it in a way that she would understand, but the language barrier was strong. I tried to make sure that she at least knew the name Jesus.

After that, I knew the best thing I could do was show Jesus to her.

I kept prodding about her life and found out that because her mom passed away, she takes care of her 7-year-old sister. [After lunch] I asked her if she and her sister had enough clothes. She said no so I offered to buy her clothes and she excitedly agreed. My experience in the market was very different this time. Before, every vendor called out to me, "SIR SIR, would you like shirt? Would you like camera?" Whatever the vendor was selling was being called out to me, but not this time.

Vendors saw me with this woman and looked away, embarrassed. It was a lot quieter than before. We eventually found jeans and shirts, and for \$32 she was able to get a few outfits for her and her sister, including a brand new pair of shoes.

As we continued to talk and get to know each other, my heart continued to break. It broke for the way people looked at her, it broke for the way she looked at herself, and it broke for the way people looked at us together.

People assumed they knew what's going on. They looked at her with contempt for what she does and what she represents.

But I know the truth.

I know that this woman isn't just a prostitute, she is an heir. I know that this precious woman is a princess and the King of Kings died for her. I know she is worth more than \$20 dollars for 4 hours and that she is treasured beyond belief. I know she is valued and loved to an extent I will only fully comprehend in heaven.

After she got her outfit, I gave her a few extra dollars and we parted ways. It was only then that Anette finally believed that I didn't want anything.

When I told her I had to go I could see [the] shock on her face. Her expression showed her disbelief in what just happened."

When I read these stories, but especially the last one, I think of the parable Jesus tells of the Good Samaritan. It's a parable about compassion being extended toward a man in desperate need, and how that compassion came from the unlikeliest of people. And then ends it with the admonition to "go and do likewise." You see: **We Christians should be**

known as people of compassion. We are called to compassion. We shouldn't be seen as an unlikely source of it, but rather we should be shining examples of it because our God is full of compassion. Jesus showed His compassion when he lived 2,000 years ago, becoming one of us, walking with us, suffering with us, and suffering for us. We are the beneficiaries of His compassion. And with Jesus as our model, and with his Spirit fueling us and his grace sustaining us, I pray that we would be known for our compassion as well, so we would show people Jesus, our compassionate Savior.

Would you help me close out this morning's message with this statement of belief?: **"I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to people in need."** Let's Pray... Amen.

- i <https://www.bostonglobe.com/sports/2018/01/31/alex-cora-takes-hands-approach-helping-his-puerto-rican-homeland/NID9aFHF7GTzL56evPVhRN/story.html>
- ii <https://www.seattletimes.com/life/you-know-that-red-sports-car-you-saw-around-redmond-it-sold-for-a-record-48-million/>
- iii https://shanghai.ist/2018/10/15/chow-yun-fat-lives-on-just-100-a-month-will-leave-entire-714-million-fortune-to-charity/?fbclid=IwAR18xdk_2-Kt5NCA45IadiNkQks_V9ahb3vj-OQwPoq_7MeINGMMyEI0QdLk
- iv <https://faithit.com/my-date-with-protitute-josh-stoneman/?fbclid=IwAR0AMRAoLGm14naP-wzYx9VAzwiXra1NLRLEQcHhajzBdPCfaQeQf-IUbM>