



Core Values
three: compassion
October 8, 2017
Courage Church, Detroit, MI

THREE: COMPASSION

I want to jump right into the message... we are getting back into our series on Core Values...

Core values are the fundamental beliefs of a person or organization...

so we are laying out these things that we believe are just absolutely essential to who we are as a church, and even more importantly, to where we are going. The goal is to have a set of values that we can bounce everything we off of... it will give us a constant gauge of “are we on the right track... are we moving in the direction that God has called us to move as a church?”

And today’s value is COMPASSION. Compassion, which is an incredible word... by definition, it is: “a sympathetic consciousness of others' distress **together** with a desire to alleviate it”

it is that prompting in your Spirit that says “something has to change” and yet it doesn’t just let itself stay a voice, it comes with this urgency that YOU have a role in BEING the change.”

that is why we believe that “Courage” is so central to all of our values, and why we had to look at that one first... because we said, “Courage goes to the places that nobody else *wants* to go”

see, a lot of people see needs, and they want to see those needs be met... they want to see those problems be solved... they want to see it get fixed....

but they don’t want to be the ones to fix it.

Because the truth is, solutions aren’t easy. Diagnosis, that can be easy.

Most people can point out a problem.

I am very good at seeing something that I think could be better... but whether or not I am actually willing to WORK to make it better is definitely a reflection of how much it *actually* bothers me.

but we want to be people who LOVE justice.

We want to be people here who are INCREDIBLY bothered by the injustices of our world, and who work to fight for Justice.

if there is a flesh and blood solution to it, we want to be that solution.

and if it feels like the only solution is a supernatural one... then we want to be the ones petitioning heaven on the behalf of others, believing for a miracle in their lives.

We believe in a God who still heals... who still answers prayers... who still comes alongside his children... we believe in a God who WANTS US to stand in the gap for our world in the spiritual realm, and wants us to physically stand in the gap for the least of these, here on earth.

that is what Jesus did.

Acts 10 (38) describes Jesus as a man who went about doing good. Now, the book of Acts was written by the gospel writer Luke, and in fact is considered by many to just be a continuation of the book of Luke... in fact, Luke himself considered it to be a continuation... he begins Acts by telling Theophilus, whom he writes both accounts to, that the first book (the Gospel of Luke) was written to deal with all that Jesus began to do and teach... and in Acts, he gets into the works of the Holy Spirit. Now, Luke 1:3 Luke addresses him as "most excellent Theophilus" - which was how those who held high positions in the Roman Empire were addressed... so many believe that Theophilus was just that... someone high in the Roman Government... which if true, is incredibly significant.

But the book of Luke focuses, more than any other gospel, on the many acts of compassion performed by Jesus. Luke is the only account we get of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10), it is the only account we get for the Prodigal Son (Luke 15) - Luke's gospel records Jesus healing the ear of the soldier after Peter cut it off (Luke 22), and Luke's gospel records Jesus on the cross, still meeting people where they are (Luke 23) when he promised to remember the criminal who was dying next to him... he said "truly, TODAY you will be with me in paradise." -

it doesn't matter what you did every moment leading up to this one... because I am meeting you in this broken place, and the rest of your eternity will be spent in paradise, WITH ME.

The Jesus that we read about in Luke turned four walled religion on its head and taught us “this is something that has to have hands and feet”

in fact, the book is often referred to as “the gospel of compassion” - we will talk about that in a couple minutes...

so I want us to look this morning at another story that ONLY shows up in Luke... and let it springboard us into a few other crucial passages... it a parable about compassion, and as many of you guys know, it has become a bit of a theme verse for us here at Courage Church in the last year... its a verse that has birthed a vision in our hearts, that we have already begun taking action steps towards... so if you would please open your bible with me to Luke 14:12-14 -

“He said also to the man who had invited him, “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.”

Lets Pray

A very common question that people often will ask me, is “why are there four gospels?” - they seem to be very repetitive... they seem to tell the same stories for the most part... but in fact, they tell the stories just differently enough that anyone reading them closely will notice, which can even seem contradictory.

There are reasons that they are the same stories, but written a bit differently... and one of the main reasons is that they were written not only by different people, but TO DIFFERENT audiences, trying to communicate in a way that THAT audience would be able to see the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Matthew wrote his gospel so that he could show the Jews that Jesus Christ is the Messiah that they have been waiting centuries for.

He was the FULFILLMENT of the Prophecies...

That is why even the genealogy is so significant... it only dates back to Abraham, who is considered to be the Father of the Jews... but Luke took his genealogy ALL the way back to Adam... because Adam is the Father of EVERYONE. And Luke wrote his gospel to emphasize that the gospel is for EVERYONE.

Luke himself was NOT an eyewitness to the life of Jesus... he was not one of the disciples, it is likely that most of what he learned about Jesus, he learned from the Apostle Paul who he traveled with. He was an educated man, a doctor... and a Gentile.

So, rather than focusing most of his energy on convincing his reader that Jesus was the fulfillment of these detailed prophecies that all the Jews studied for centuries... Luke wrote more broadly, focusing on the way that Jesus breaks down cultural and socio economic barriers, and meets everyone where they are...

For example, in the parable of the Good Samaritan, which is ONLY found in Luke, Jesus tells a Jewish law expert a story about a man beaten on the side of the road, and a priest walks by, and doesn't stop to help... and a Levite walks by, and doesn't help either...

but the HERO of the story, the person who DOES STOP and sacrifices tremendously to help... was a Samaritan... which was a people group that Jews in that day HATED, because of a feud that dated all the way back to the days of Jonah.

When Jesus asks the lawyer, "which man do you think was a neighbor?" the lawyer responded by saying: "the one who showed **mercy**"

Mercy is the Greek word "*eleos*" meaning "ACTIVE COMPASSION." I love the way that William Barclay describes it... he says it is to "get into someone else's skin" - so with that view... in the parable Jesus told to the lawyer... compassion would be seeing the world through the eyes of the Samaritan... and acting accordingly.

The one who was a neighbor was the one who didn't only know the right thing to do... because they ALL knew the right thing to do... but the one who actually DID the right thing...

another example is this... in Matthew 5:48 is one of the hardest verses for most of us to swallow... in it Jesus says "be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

again, Matthew writes to the Hebrew audience... a Hebrew would have understood "perfect" not to mean "perfection" like we think of it... but rather to mean: "wholeness, or completeness, lacking nothing."

but Luke says something different entirely... because remember who he was writing too...

He translates it as: "Be compassionate, as your Father is compassionate."

Because writing to a man who was likely extremely high up and influential in the Roman Empire, who can have probably anything he wants... who's empire was built by armies and taking anything they want... what would most likely be missing? what would be the reason they would be "incomplete"?

Compassion.

seeing the world through the eyes of someone who doesn't have what you have... seeing the world through the eyes of someone who maybe has lost EVERYTHING because of the very empire you are serving.

and so it goes, throughout the book.

Luke is, more than others, the story of a God who meets people in all the broken places... it is "the gospel of compassion."

and just from that basic background, I hope that you can see how incredibly crucial it is that our church be a place that meets people in those same broken places... that we be a people who find needs, and fill them. That we be people of empathy, love, and generosity.

Now, This verse we read about the banquet is pretty self explanatory. It is pretty clear what Jesus is saying... it is not one that we need to go to the Greek and try and figure out if maybe he means something else by what he is saying, he says the same things in enough different ways to make it obvious...

When you throw a banquet... don't invite your friends... invite the ones who could NEVER pay you back...

but this verse leaves, probably most of us, myself included with a very difficult dilemma...

the problem is, I don't know anybody who does this. I teach the Bible, and yet I have NEVER in my life been to a party like this, nor have I thrown one.

even more than that, most of us don't even know people like the ones described here. We aren't in relationship with them, and wouldn't know where to begin in the first place doing something like that.

Naturally we tend to spend time with people who are like us, and even though most of us wouldn't want to admit this, we would prefer investing our time and money into people who there is at least some sort of a chance of a return on that investment.

So to intentionally go out and serve people who you specifically KNOW will NOT be able to pay you back, you really have to come to terms with why you are placed on this earth in the first place...

we are NOT here on this earth to build something for ourselves. Our Empires... Rome's empire... America's Empire...

Our job is to build the Kingdom of Heaven, and when you live with the kind of intention that specifically *gives* in ways that you know will never come back on you... you are throwing aside whatever agenda you intentionally OR UNINTENTIONALLY may have, and you are completely submerging yourself into God's agenda.

Many of you know, that in an effort to take Jesus literally here... one of the big projects that we set our eyes on doing is something we call "The Reconciliation Table"

and what we are going to do, is build an absolutely enormous table, spanning as far as we can possibly make it span... on the Courage House side lot... and then when we host Short Term Missions teams here in Detroit, one of the projects we will do with the teams is they will do feasts just like Jesus describes here... they will go out, into the streets... make friends with people they do not know... people who could never PAY FOR the meal that we provide them... they will bring them back, and we will throw just an amazing banquet for them, and actually work to build relationships with them.

It has been pretty amazing, because with the first Courage House, we looked at so many houses, and so many deals fell through before we got the one that we have... and it wasn't until the vision for the reconciliation table was birthed, that the right house actually became available... and this house CAME WITH a side lot. and I believe that there is something too this concept...

when we were speaking at the church in Portland last week, we briefly mentioned the Reconciliation Table, and that was the one thing that the MOST people approached me about after... "I want to be involved in THAT!" they would say... because more and more it seems like people are coming to terms with the fact that so much of what we do as Christians doesn't actually look like Jesus, and what he said to do.

So people seem to be eager to jump at opportunities to live out the red letters, because most of us are sick of saying something and doing nothing... which I am extremely encouraged by.

and the first reaction to that may be "well, there is more in the bible than just compassion... more than just generosity... more than serving people..."

right? like: what about prayer? what about worship? what about fasting?

Those things are all CRUCIAL... they are important, and in fact are part of our Core Values that we will talk about in later messages... but the Bible makes it very clear that as important as those things are, nothing puts you CLOSER to God than serving others... Jeremiah 22:16 “He plead the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well. Is not this to know me? declares the Lord.

Knowing God means pleading the cause of the least of these.

see, if you aren't careful, you can do THESE things (prayer, fasting, worship) and you can make it all about you... and what you can get from God FOR YOURSELF but when you start at the place that says “I am going to plead the cause of OTHER PEOPLE” you are automatically getting outside of yourself.

another example is Isaiah 58 - it is an incredible passage that we use a lot... it is the section that says that the church is called to be “the repairers of the breach” - we are called to “rebuild the broken cities” - its another theme verse for us... but did you know that that verse we use so often, Isaiah 58:12, is only the END of a huge section that starts in verse 1... and the section starts by all of these “people of God” getting frustrated AT GOD because they are FASTING... and God is not responding to it...

and then God gives them an incredibly powerful response:

He tells them... yes, you fast, but yet you still oppress your workers... you seek your own pleasure... you are working for your own needs...

You ignore needs that you see in others, because you have your own.

You are fasting... because you want God to do something FOR YOU... but you aren't living your life as someone who is here to bring the Kingdom of Heaven to earth... you just want it for your own life, and in your desperation for something “spiritual” to happen, you neglected the fact that it is YOUR JOB to bring heaven to earth for someone else.

God says to them: “Fasting like yours this day **will not** make your voice to be heard on high.”

It won't reach heaven, if you aren't bringing heaven to earth.

and the reason that this resonates so much with me, is because I think that this is probably the main reason that we don't help others as much as we should... it is the reason so many people BELIEVE IN THE MISSION of the church, but don't tithe... don't give to it... or don't give to help someone, or help buy a family a Christmas, whatever it may be... it is usually NOT because they just don't want to help... usually it is this:

"I have too many needs myself... I am barely eating myself" - it gets even heavier when you get family involved... "I can't even take care of my own family, much less support someone else, be generous to a stranger." But if you turn your back on the needs that are directly in front of you, that you know, at least with a little maneuvering you could be a part of that solution... then you can't expect your prayers to be heard.

and then God speaks again, and tells what kind of fasting WILL get through to him... he says:

Is not this the fast I choose?

to loose the bonds of wickedness, to let the oppressed go free, TO SHARE YOUR BREAD WITH THE HUNGRY, and to bring the homeless poor INTO your house...

God says the the fast He chooses, the one he ACCEPTS... is:

Not one where you separate yourself from the world, but one where you ENGAGE IT. where you use the resources that you have been given, to help another.

How many of us do that?

How many of us throw parties like Jesus says to throw?

most people live like these words are jokes... or at least like they are suggestions... most people live their Christian lives ignoring the reality that

the harshest judgments that Jesus ever spoke about are set aside for those who do NOT take care of the least of these...

WE HAVE TO BE A CHURCH THAT HELPS PEOPLE. We have to be a generous church who is GOOD to our city.

Did you know that the word "give" shows up in the bible more than the word "love"?

add to "love" the word "prayer" and the word "believe" - you put them all together, and you still have more "gives"

love is the greatest, but to live it, takes action... but to "give" is to express your love in a tangible way.

another of the most common verses people use for this is James 1:27... it says:

"Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world."

and the thing that I love about this, is it blows our idea of what religion is out of the water... because especially in the last 15 or so years, even Christians have come down really hard on "religion" - saying things like "Religion Kills, Jesus saves" - I had the sticker on my guitar case, so I speak from experience.

and then it cites Matthew 23 because in Matthew 23 Jesus comes down extremely hard on the religious leaders... but the problem isn't that they were actually being religious like James describes religion... the problem is that they had distorted what religion was supposed to be, and turned it into something different entirely.

In Hebrew, the word "religion" was made up of two letters... "tav" and "dalet" - and in the ancient Hebrew word picture, which came LONG BEFORE JESUS... the picture for the letter "tav" was a cross... which to

them, again, before Jesus, meant “covenant” - and the picture for “dalet” is the picture of a door.

so they would have understood religion to be “the door to the covenant”

The covenant was essentially the marriage agreement that Israel had with God... it meant they were in a relationship WITH GOD.

but now that we understand the significance of the cross, and the fact that in Christ is the “New Covenant” - I prefer to say it this way... “religion is the door to the cross”

that is why I believe that James says “religion” is taking care of widows and orphans... it is showing Jesus to the one who, if they were to gage the hope of their future based on the things that have happened to them thus far in life... they would have little hope.

But when a follower of Jesus does something that actually looks like Jesus, and they live the love and compassion that Luke writes about so beautifully... suddenly, they are opening a door for the broken, to find hope. They are taking care of the least of these, showing them that they matter.

Because according to the cross, they do matter. Jesus died for them, just like he did for you...

that is why Jesus says go and invite people who can't pay you back... because if any of it was based on merit then it wouldn't be grace... and for a person who is starving to death, the gospel doesn't look very appealing if it doesn't come with something tangible that they can touch.

because true religion is action. it is not rules. it is not walls.

The reason that Jesus was so hard on Pharisees in Matthew 23 is because of what they had done WITH religion... one of the seven woes he pronounces to them in Matthew 23(v13) says to the Pharisees - “you SHUT the Kingdom of Heaven in peoples faces” - their “religion” was closing people off to the gospel when it was supposed to point people to it.

True religion is something that will open someone up to the gospel of grace...

and our call to live compassionately shouldn't be as hard as we often make it, we should get to a point in our lives when compassion just overflows right out of us, as a response to the enormous amount of compassion that we have been shown.

Psalms 34:18 puts it this way...

“The Lord is near to the brokenhearted
and saves the crushed in spirit.”

There is no denying, our world is so broken right now.

and what I am about to share... I don't even know if this has anything to do with the message or not... I think it does... but its on my heart...

A few days before what happened in Vegas, you may have read about this...

Dawn was away for her seated session for her masters program, and we have the Olive Garden never ending pasta pass, so I was at Olive Garden alone... and since I was alone, I read on my phone.

And I was reading about a kid in New York City, in the Bronx stabbed another kid, in a classroom, and killed him... it was the first murder in the New York School System, in, I think over 20 years... and as I was reading the story, the bullying, the family struggles... the tipping point moment where one kid flicked a pencil at another... I just cried.

Because we don't know how to treat each other. We don't understand the value of human life... we don't understand the gift that is life... we don't grasp that we have our lives, because Jesus valued us so much, that he gave up his...

and I kept thinking... how do we teach kids??? how we do teach them to treat each other? and it comes down to value. We have to teach our kids

that even the people who may seem different from us, are our brothers, and our sisters... they are God's children...

In Las Vegas, a man just decided that he wanted to kill people... no value of human life. Not a moment of seeing the world through the eyes of another... just seeking to hurt.

and this is so stupid that I even have to admit this...

but here is the truth... I woke up on Monday, I saw that people were posting about Vegas... and I knew... it was another crazy attack. I got really sad... but I was not for even a moment surprised...

it happens too often.

and I said a prayer, and I posted that I was praying... and I thought a little bit about it throughout the day and when I thought about it, I would get choked up for a moment... I would have thoughts like "it could happen anywhere... to anyone..." for a moment... I held my kids a little tighter that day...

but even though I was sad... I was also a bit numb to it.

I think a lot of people are. Because we keep hearing these stories... and they get worse and worse... and we have come to expect it.

but I have a friend in Los Angeles... a very good friend. Extremely influential in my life before I ever met Dawn, and extremely influential in Dawn and I's life after... we wouldn't be where we are I don't think, if it wasn't for this man... he is not a Christian... but he is a friend...

and a couple of days after the Vegas attack, he posted something on facebook.

I shared it... it had some language, but I shared it anyway, and I am going to read it now:

“This has been really hard for me to post, because I usually keep things private. As soon as my friend told me to put on the news Sunday night, I saw the horrible tragedy in Las Vegas unfolding. Then I remembered that my friends Justin and Keri were in Las Vegas for the show, and my heart sank, and I immediately texted them to make sure they were ok. You always hope for the best. I didn't hear back for a couple of hours and checked again, checked their facebooks and instagram seeing if anyone heard from them. I knew it was chaos and people might not be able to respond for a while. I fell asleep with my phone in my hand.

When I woke up the next morning Justin texted me saying "they took her". I couldn't believe it. Those words were so horrible and shocking to read. You just don't expect it to be a friend of yours. I couldn't stop crying. A minute later, Justin called me crying and told me what happened. She died in his arms and he wouldn't leave her, so instead of running for safety, he started to administer CPR to other victims while that #**#* was still shooting. Justin was a marine who served in Iraq, and he's proven that he's still a hero. I had spoken to Keri Sunday morning about having her kids do a photo shoot for one of the bands we manage, The Wrecks. She replied right away "Yes! They will do it for free dollars! I will take them out of school". I can't believe that was the last time I will ever hear from her. Keri was such a nice person, and so great to her kids and her husband Justin. I want her to be remembered and not be a nameless, faceless victim from that tragedy. I know it's hard to hear and hard to watch the news, but we have to remember all of those innocent people.

My heart is breaking for Justin, their 3 young children and Keri's family, as well as all of the other victims and their families of this horrible tragedy. I can't stop crying as I'm typing this.

Justin asked me to share this campaign to help with funeral arrangements. If you can even donate a couple of dollars, it's appreciated.”

again I shared this on facebook, so if you want to give, you can...

but here is why I included this, this morning:

it is just a tragedy... until it happens to you.

it is just a tragedy... until it happens to someone you love.

and as I read those words... again, I cried... and cried... and cried... and I don't know that girl, or her husband... but I know my friend Richard. and as I read his words, I began to see the world through his eyes for a moment... I began to imagine what he must be feeling, for a moment... I thought about what it would be like to lay in my bed in uncertainty, falling asleep with my hand on my phone waiting for an answer to a question I never in a million years thought that I would have to ask to someone who meant so much to me...

And suddenly, I wasn't numb anymore. it felt as if it had happened to me... and it did not feel good.

every person that was killed has people they left behind, who are broken.
every person has a name.

Every person we pass at the intersections who is begging for food to eat... they have a name... and a face... and a story.

We can't get numb to it.

We can't grow cold to these tragedies... these injustices... these disasters.
This pain that other people feel. We have to work to be the change...

but if everything for us is just a spectator sport... where we are always in the audience, we are never on the ground...

then we will watch things happen to other people as if we were watching a movie... and most of us have seen enough of them by now, that they don't have much of an affect on us.

But one of the most DIVINE parts about BEING HUMAN... is that we have the ability to empathize - we have the ability to put ourselves there...

and even more importantly than that... we have a GOD who empathizes... Hebrews 4:15 says "surely we do NOT have a high priest who is UNABLE to empathize with our weakness" - no... our God gets it... he was tempted in every way as we are... and he went through far more pain than any of us could even imagine... yet He was willing to die for us.

it is the compassion of God that should lead us to compassion for man.

A few months ago, Dawn and I tagged team a message, and in it we talked about something we called “the circle of Mercy.” it is nothing fancy... in fact, in many ways we made it up. But it comes from the fifth beatitude, in Matthew 5 when Jesus says: Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.

Mercy is the only beatitude that Jesus gives us, in which the person who gives it receives the SAME thing in return. Jesus is saying “Mercy circles backs on you.”

and when we view this from the perspective of our community... of Courage Church... what we have is a circle of people who are actively compassionate toward one another. It becomes the blood flow of our Christian communities.

If we have a community who lives by this beatitude, what we have are people who see the world through each others eyes... and in a world like that there is no black and white, there is no rich and poor... there isn't an “in crowd” or an “out crowd”... at least not amongst us.

Because ultimately when something happens to someone, it happens to everyone. If an injustice is done to one, then we all drop everything, and for as long as it takes... we all see the world through their eyes...

that is true mercy. That is ACTIVE COMPASSION.

This is why I said what I did a few weeks ago about the problem with viewing every social issue involving injustice as having “two sides” - because obviously, there are always two sides... sometimes more... there two opinions... or more... ALWAYS...

but if every time someone is hurt by something, you have to stand up, and puff yourself up, and show them WHY another view exists explaining WHY THEY SHOULDN'T BE HURT... then you have completely thrown empathy

OUT THE WINDOW. You have completely thrown mercy OUT the window...

But “blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.”

Paul says it like this, “mourn with those who mourn”

cry with people when they are crying.

See the world through others perspective...

look around at what they are feeling, and force yourself to understand why... why does THIS PERSON feel this way? rather than thinking of reasons that “if it were me, I wouldn’t be upset about this...”

you can’t be actively compassionate... absolutely whole heartedly empathetic toward another human being if you have your own opinion about why they shouldn’t feel the way that they feel.

AND compassionate people can’t justify NOT helping someone, with thoughts like this:

“well, they wouldn’t be there... IF”

if they worked a little harder...

if they had done their job...

if they had not run away...

no... you... remember... mercy does the opposite... mercy looks at the person... and immediately puts themselves in THEIR skin... immediately begins to look at the world through THEIR EYES... not to think “okay I am in their skin now... so what could I have done differently to NOT end up here” NO!!!!!! but rather, to think: “what do I NEED right now?”

What would show me Jesus right now?

What would open the door to the cross in this moment?

How do we be Jesus right now?

Jesus was ALL about COMPASSION.

and this is the way that we look at compassion at Courage Church:

Compassion sees the world through the eyes of others, and it is stirred to action by what it sees.

It can not sit by while injustice is done around it.
it pleads the cause of the poor and the needy (Jeremiah 22:16)
and the widow and the orphan (James 1:27)

and it never gives up on anyone.

Lets end with a scripture:

Isaiah 49:13

“Sing for joy, O heavens, and exult, O earth;
break forth, O mountains, into singing!
For the Lord has comforted his people
and will have compassion on his afflicted.”