

Compassion Sunday

06.03.2018

Good Morning Mercy Church! If you are new with us my name is Spence and I serve as the lead pastor here for Mercy Church. Things are going to be a little different today than they are on a typical weekend. Today is our first ever compassion Sunday. And we are pretty excited about it. In fact I've been waiting on this day since we launched Mercy Church 2.5 years ago. Today Mercy Church is officially kicking off a partnership with a ministry called Compassion International.

Compassion International is a 66 year old ministry committed to releasing children from poverty in Jesus' name. How they do this is really cool. They create partnerships with local churches in poverty stricken communities around the world. They establish after-school programs that children can attend where they will receive food, basic healthcare, education, and training in the gospel. The kids in these communities have very little and so they flock to these programs. And here's the cool part...the way every child gets in is by being sponsored by an individual or family somewhere else around the world.

And the sponsorship is the genius of the program. It's not primarily about someone like me or you sending money. Yes that has to happen, but ya'll there is a legit relationship Compassion helps build between the sponsor and the child. We'll get into that more later but I just want to say up front how legit this ministry is.

I went on a trip with them last year to the Dominican Republic. We saw several compassion locations, I asked ALOT of questions. And I met children and they know their sponsor. In fact one little 4th grader went to her little mat where she slept and pulled out from under it the last 3 letters her sponsor had sent her. It was cool. My family has personally had a great experience with this organization. And if nothing else, We've never devoted a Sunday to one particular ministry before which should tell you what we believe about it.

But here's what I want to do first. I want to show you WHY caring for the poor, especially fellow churches in poverty, is not a burden to us but instead a gift God has given us. Why giving ourselves away, our money and time etc, to the poor in God's church...actually unlocks the power of the gospel to change our own lives.

So often we hear things like "here's a sad face of a poor kid & you drink \$14 coffee. Stop being a greedy American and help Juan Pablo." Now listen, it is in part true. Most adults in America are considered wealthy by the world's standards even if you wake up to folgers in your cup and spam on your plate. But, to say caring for the poor is the obligation of the rich is foolish and shallow. So here's our big idea I want to show you from scripture today.

Releasing others from poverty is not the obligation of the rich, it's the privilege of the poor.

Turn in your bible to 2 Corinthians 8.1-9

Here's the situation. The church in Jerusalem is in poverty. I mean they had nothing. So Paul is taking up a collection from other churches for that church in need. And by the time he writes to the Corinthians he's with the churches in Macedonia. This is Northern Greece. Philippi & Thessolonica....Sounds familiar to you maybe if you've flipped through the new testament.

And he's so captured by them that he tells the story to the Corinthian believers to inspire them. And I want to walk you through it in hopes that you will 1) see why you are in fact poor. 2) see why you are in fact rich and 3) see why it is a great privilege to give to the poor. Then we'll finish with how all this plays out today.

[1] We want you to know, brothers, about the grace of God that has been given among the churches of Macedonia, [2] for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part.

- Severe test of affliction - Listen these young churches were being severely persecuted for believing the gospel. This was not an easy time for them. This was a time where no one would have faulted them for going underground. And YET...Paul doesn't call it affliction. He calls it a test of affliction. It's a test because he knows in this moment is an opportunity for this church to flourish. Crisis is an opportunity to trust the Lord. And then look at this...
- Two things converged in this moment of affliction...Their abundance of Joy and their extreme poverty.
- Get this: **They Had Nothing...And yet they had everything.** You see that? People in persecution and in poverty. They had nothing when you look at their circumstance. Yet...they had an ABUNDANCE of joy. And this is true of everyone who meets Christ. The gospel says we are all alike...we are sinners. We've incurred a debt in our sin that must be paid. And all our best deeds & all our wealth...none of it will save us from our sin. Nothing can pay that debt. We are all POOR. We can't do enough to EARN God's forgiveness and grace. Then the gospel says Christ comes and pays our debt for us. So God forgives us. And he doesn't just forgive us, he adopts us as his children. So now we who had NOTHING...have been given the inheritance of the one who owns the world. We have perfect love poured out on us, we have eternity secured with that father...we who had nothing, have everything! That love creates JOY! Deep joy of the soul that no circumstance can shake! **The gospel says though you have nothing God gives you everything.**

And when those two things collided: the result was an overflowing wealth of generosity on their part.

- And here's what that means: **Their circumstances didn't determine their joy. Their joy determined their response to their circumstances.** Do you catch that? You gotta see these two things. Because some of you are still allowing your circumstances to determine your joy. You are letting what is happening around you and to you decide if you will be a joyful person. That means you haven't let the gospel drive deep enough yet into your heart. **I promise you in**

Christ your circumstances don't have to determine your joy again. See Paul had already taught the Philippian church this truth

[12] I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. [13] I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Philippians 4:12-13

- So now they were living this out. In a time of hunger & need they are strengthened by Christ. Their money, their wealth, their ease of life...that doesn't give them strength. That doesn't bring joy. Christ does. Paul keeps bragging on them...

[3] For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own accord,

- Obviously this was not a huge amount of money. They didn't have that. But it was an overflowing amount for them. And I want you to see this in case you think today is me trying to get you to pry your wallet open. No. God is always after your heart. That's why so many examples in scripture are not about the AMOUNT but about the heart of the one giving. Nor is it manipulation of the poor. This is important as well. Prosperity gospel often preys on the poor. It preys on everyone but especially the poor. Paul says no this was of their own accord. In chapter 9 he's going to say everyone must give as he or she decides. NOT under compulsion though. In fact, look at what he says happened...

[4] begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints—

- They BEGGED! They had to get in on it. They begged us for the FAVOR...the favor. These poor Christians regarded the request Paul gave them as a privilege! Why? Because they saw what this moment really was. It was a chance for them to do for someone else what Christ had done for them. By giving away some of themselves...by becoming a little poorer...others could be relieved from the poverty they were in. Ya'll...That's a visible demonstration of the gospel.
- Read about the persecuted church in china this week. Story of one little house church in southern china where authorities arrested a house-church pastor. His wife was put under house arrest. They had 7 kids. And she was told she could go out to the local market, that's it. Didn't matter to her she had no \$ to buy food anyway. But she was told by her church to wear a shawl with baggy pockets & go to market. She walked through the market getting bumped & nudged and when she got home her pockets were full of onions & tomatoes & other foods. Some weeks pockets were full of money. Sometimes a chicken would appear on her porch. The point is, it was the joy of this poor house church to provide for this poor woman. In doing so they demonstrated the gospel to her which was something they saw as a privilege to get to do. Releasing others from poverty is not the obligation of the rich, it's the privilege of the poor!
- Here comes the second most important verse in this passage. The most important is the last verse.

[5] and this, not as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then by the will of God to us.

- Look at the order. See the first thing this church did...they once again opened their hands and said God...everything I have is a gift from you. It's all yours! And listen to me, this is big for some of you I bet. As long as you think what you have is YOURS, giving it away will be hard. You may give of your excess, but you'll rarely if ever give as a sacrifice and you'll struggle to find joy in it. But when you give yourself to the Lord that's you acknowledging everything I have is from God anyways. My talent, my wealth, my time, my friends, my health... that's all God's. And when you believe the gospel you submit yourself to the authority of God. He's the new head of your life. This is really, really hard because we feel a fierce independence where we don't want to be told what to do. Especially with our stuff. One of the first words a child learns to speak is "MINE!" That's not trained. It's just a word to express our natural feelings of selfishness. But when you come to realize everything you have is God's...and that the best thing for you here on earth will be how you deploy those resources the way God desires...everything changes. The Macedonians re-committed themselves to the Lord again that day and then with open hands said ok Lord where do you want us to put your resources? Opportunity came open, they moved. This doesn't mean every opportunity...but it does mean they were excited, joyful, about opportunities to demonstrate the gospel to others in this way.

[6] Accordingly, we urged Titus that as he had started, so he should complete among you this act of grace. [7] But as you excel in everything—in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all earnestness, and in our love for you—see that you excel in this act of grace also....[9] For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich. 2 Corinthians 8.9

Verse 9 is the most important verse. It's the gospel in a verse. You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. What is his grace:

- He was rich. How? He was with God the father in heaven. He had everything. Yet he became poor. How? Several layers to this one. First he came and took on human form. And the human body here on earth aint the glorified redeemed body we will have one day. But then he was born into relative poverty. He was the son of a carpenter. Then he became poor as a wandering teacher with nowhere to lay his head. But then...he became poor as a falsely convicted criminal...THEN he became poor in blood. He EMPTIED HIMSELF. HE PAID OUR DEBT WITH HIS BLOOD DYING A HUMILIATING CRIMINALS DEATH ON A CROSS... FOR YOUR SAKE!
- Why? So that you through his poverty...by losing his blood he became poor...and then you who had NO CHANCE to be with the father...by believing what Christ has done for you become rich. See Christ looked at your poverty..and it wasn't his obligation to relieve your poverty, it was his privilege. It was his joy to become poor for your sake.

- Have you every given yourself to the Lord? Have you received his gift of generosity towards you?

See this opportunity today, it's just an opportunity. It's a moment where I feel like we are where the Corinthians were. Some believers in need of help in reaching their community are asking for help. And maybe you will respond to this one maybe not. I love it because its such a beautiful demonstration of the gospel.

today we get an opportunity to do that. Just one opportunity we believe in. Plenty of other ways you can obey this of course. But this is a clearly marked step I think many of us should take together today. And in fact, I think doing this one step that kind of easy and laid out for you will be a catalyst to inspire you to lead our church in caring for the poor right here at home in many other ways we haven't gotten to yet. Because your heart is going to be set on fire by experiencing ***the privilege of releasing others from poverty just as God has released you.*** As your pastor I can't wait for you to lead us in that.

I want to take a second and show you a video of one life changed through compassion and how God continues to change others through his life...

[Video]

Let's welcome up Samuel Orlando. I met him in his home country close to a year ago. I had the privilege of hearing his story then and seeing first hand the great work compassion does. I wanted him to share a little with us for the next few minutes about his experience and the impact he's seen through compassion.

1. How did your life change once you were enrolled in Compassion?
2. What was the turning point in your life?
3. What was your relationship like with your sponsor?
4. What are you doing now?
5. What would you tell someone thinking about sponsoring a child today?

Pray for Samuel

Close of service

Here's how we are going to finish the service. We've set aside the last 10 minutes of service for you to go out under the tent outside and get the information you need to sponsor a child. You are going to get a packet like this. Listen its \$38 per month. That's no small thing. I was talking to pastor scott this week who grew up in the D.R. he said time after time he watched compassion prove to be the real thing there. Change lives time and again.

Ya'll at the end of the day I love my 4 kids. I'd do anything for them. I'd die for them. And the parents of these children feel the same way about their kids. My kids didn't choose to be born into middle class america and these didn't choose to be born into

poverty. They aren't less of a person or less valued by God. And we have the chance to provide for them.