

“Self indulgence v. Compassion”

James 5:1-6

June 15, 2008

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www.soundliving.org

(compassion; social concerns/justice)

Just east of Pueblo, Colorado is Los Pobres (“The Have-nots”)

This facility and workers, like Mary Crofton, are dedicated to helping migrant farm workers.

Mary worked at St Mary-Corwin Medical Center before going to Los Pobres about 7 years ago.

She and others say that housing is a major problem for many of the migrants.

Within a ½ mile of \$300,000 homes are informal migrant camps made up of Tuff Sheds, dilapidated mobile homes and other makeshift shelters, usually without utilities except for an occasional portable toilet.

Employers are not required to provide housing for the workers and even when provided, many can't afford the company housing.

“If growers provide the housing, it must meet high state and federal standards. Anybody else can rent substandard housing to migrants and pile them 10 to 20 in one house.”

Mary went to one of those homes and there she met the Hernandez family of 10 from Brownsville, Texas.

Bertha, the mother, and the two oldest daughters work in the fields and the 7 other children stay at home.

They lived in a trash trailer south of Avondale.

Before that they lived out of a van.

The Hernandezes are typical of the migrant families that have come to rely on the services offered at Los Pobres Center.

Services include recycled clothing and shoes, food staples, health, dental and prenatal care clinics, and a place to take a shower.

One of the Los Pobres workers said, "Every day is a crisis. (Workers) have shut-off notices, sick children and rain (days they can't work).

According to these reports, these migrant workers earn between \$30 and \$50 a day, depending on the type of work they are doing.

I complain about the high cost of a cantaloupe at the grocery store and then I hear that laborers in the San Luis Valley may make minimum wage.

Do the math: If they worked 10-hours/day/6-days/wk/52-wks/year they'd make less than \$22,000/year.

Source: The Pueblo Chieftain
Publication date: August 13, 2007

<http://www.masonryconstruction.com/industry-news.asp?articleID=553865§ionID=0>

These words could be describing some of the workers on the farms just north of Denver or the men and women we see every day working in the restaurants we frequent or doing the landscaping in our neighborhoods or even here at our church.

I thought the plight of some of the American migrant workers was particularly apropos in light of today's text from James 5:1-6:
"Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you. ² Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. ³ Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days. ⁴ Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty. ⁵ You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter. ⁶ You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you."

Do you feel defensive yet?

Have you already begun thinking about how my opening illustration has nothing to do with this text or at the very least how this text has nothing to do with you?

I find James' words unsettling.

Let me tell you now, if you hear James clearly, it will affect your bank account, it will affect your lifestyle and it will affect the goals of your life.

When I decided to do the spring sermon series from the book of James I did so for several reasons.

- One, I knew I needed a relatively short book to fit into the three months of April-June.
- Two, I hadn't ever preached all the way through the book.
- And three, I thought after preaching for so many months through the heavily doctrinal book of Romans, the shorter and eminently practical book of James would be good.

In fact, we titled the series "Shoe-leather Christianity."

But the more I have studied it the more convinced I am that I mislabeled the series.

James is blunt, confrontational, and maybe even harsh in his indictments of illegitimate Christianity.

I think a better series title might have been, "The Tests of Genuine Christianity."

- He confronted us early on with James 1:19-27, a true Christian is a person who manifests in his life that his claims to repentance and faith are real.
- It came again in James 2:14-26, a faith that doesn't result in mercy and charity is no faith at all.
- And again in James 3:1-12, what comes out of the mouth is a principle gauge of whether one is truly a Christian.
- And again in James 3:13-18, genuine Christianity flows from a changed heart.
- And in our text for today James 5:1-6, he writes about our money.

How we get and use our money is an indicator of genuine Christianity.

We believe the Bible teaches that a right relationship with God is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

But we believe equally strongly that the Bible teaches salvation to a right relationship with God results in a changed and changing way of life.

Nominal Christianity is no Christianity at all.

Matthew 7:15, 22-23 “By their fruit you will recognize them.”
 “Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord... Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’”

As we have seen, James clearly believes that. and he challenges his readers over and over again to challenge the genuineness of their faith.

I have discovered that the scholars debate whether this text is addressed to Christians or non-Christians but I wonder if it matters.

While not all Scripture is written to us, it is written for us. (Blanchard, *Truth for Life*, 328)

And even if James was addressing those in the church who weren't truly Christians, he could as one author put it, “easily expect errant Christian brothers and sister to recognize themselves in the negative descriptions borrowed from the prophets.” (Nystrom, 268)

So either way, I have to deal with what James is saying here.

Listen again to James' hard words:

James 5:1 “Now listen, you rich people, weep and wail because of the misery that is coming upon you.”

James sees into the future and sees a severe judgment on the unrepentant rich.

“Weep” means to cry and “wail” is used in the OT always of the response to judgment.

The “misery” is that judgment of God that is to come.

Jesus said in Luke 6:24-25 “But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. ²⁵ Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry.”

Here in verse 3 James writes that your lifestyle “will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire.”

In verse 5 he says, “You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter.”

James pulls no punches; his language is discomfoting.

He says that people who live like this should expect harsh judgment from God.

I read those words and I’m so glad that I’m **not** one of those “rich people.”

To most of us the “rich” are those who **make** more and/or **have** more than we do.

But James doesn’t define “rich people” as those earning over a certain amount or having assets over a certain amount.

We will see here that James defines the rich as **those who have more than enough and more importantly by their selfishness in light of those without enough.**

The truth is I’m reminded of my “wealth” every time I put out the trash.

“What must we be spending to produce that much garbage?”

You might be tempted to turn me off thinking that I’m just going to rail against American affluence and in particular attempt to make everyone feel guilty for having a house, a car, and other nice things when there are people starving in the world.

But I think in light of God’s material blessing on many people in the Bible, we can safely say **God is not opposed to his children being wealthy.**

He is, however, opposed to their misuse of that wealth.

So I beg you to hear me out.

James wants us to think about how we get our wealth and how we use it.

Now I grant you that James goes at the issue very negatively.

He indicts with strong words:

You have hoarded.

You have defrauded.

And you have indulged.

Hear him on the issue of hoarding: James 5:2-3 “Your wealth has rotted, and moths have eaten your clothes. ³ Your gold and silver are corroded. Their corrosion will testify against you and eat your flesh like fire. You have hoarded wealth in the last days.

Look at the description of their wealth.

It has rotted, the clothes are moth-eaten and the gold and silver are corroded.

The wealth has clearly been stored not used.

You don't need it; you just have it.

- Does not the increasing number of storage units in our country testify against us?
- How about investments far beyond what we need or ever will need?

Years ago one man wrote, “There is not a vice which more effectually contracts and deadens the feelings, which more completely makes a man's affections center in himself and excludes all others from partaking in the, than the desire of accumulating possessions.” (Thomas Manton in Blanchard, 336)

When it is prudent saving and when is it sinful hoarding?

William Bates, a Puritan preacher, has written timeless advice on the use of wealth:

When riches and power are employed for the glory of God and the good of others, they are a happy advantage to those that possess them. All benefits are virtual obligations; and the greater our receipts are, the greater our accounts will be. God has a sovereign right in all things we have, and they are not to be employed merely for our pleasure and profit, but according to his will, and for his honor [*The Complete Works of William Bates*, vol. II, 282].

More recently another man wrote, “There is a difference between prudent saving for the future, which the Bible admonishes us to do, and a greedy, self-centered hoarding for the present. One looks at wealth as a means to sustain the believer in service to God. The other looks at wealth as everything, as security in life. Finding joy in

giving to others, investing our resources in the work of God's kingdom, and maintaining moderation in what we possess help us to use our wealth wisely. When our security abides in our wealth then it has ceased to be a tool and has become a lord over our lives.

Phil Newton sermon on James 5:1-6 http://www.southwoodsbc.org/sermons/james_05.01-06.html

John Calvin: "God has not appointed gold for rust, nor garments for moth; but, on the contrary, he has designed them as aids and helps to human life." (in Moo, 214)

A more contemporary author, Randy Alcorn, wrote, "God prospers me not to raise my standard of living but to raise my standard of giving. God gives us more money than we need so that we can give generously." *The Treasure Principle*

But here in James we find that their hoarded wealth testifies that they have been focusing on the here and now to the exclusion of God's kingdom.

Jesus said in Matthew 6:19-21 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

James says that hoarding is not only contrary to how God would have us use our money but also what we have hoarded will **testify against us in the judgment.**

The story is told of a godless American farmer who wrote to his local newspaper explaining, "I have been conducting an experiment in one of my fields. I have plowed it on Sundays, sowed the seed on Sundays, watered and weeded it on Sundays, and gathered the harvest on Sundays-and I want to tell you that this October I have the finest crop of Indian corn in the whole neighborhood."

The local editor replied by adding a footnote, "God does not settle all his accounts in October!" Blanchard, *Truth for life*, 334)

I believe the Bible says we will give an account for how we have used the money and possessions that have been entrusted to us.

I don't think it is a stretch to say that James says how we use our money is a key indicator of the genuineness of our faith.

James says not only have you hoarded but you have defrauded.
James 5:4 “Look! The wages you failed to pay the workmen who mowed your fields are crying out against you. The cries of the harvesters have reached the ears of the Lord Almighty.

Leviticus 19:13 “ ‘Do not defraud your neighbor or rob him. “ ‘Do not hold back the wages of a hired man overnight.

Deuteronomy 24:14-15 Do not take advantage of a hired man who is poor and needy, whether he is a brother Israelite or an alien living in one of your towns. ¹⁵ Pay him his wages each day before sunset, because he is poor and is counting on it.

I read this week, “The message of James is at least this: Christians are to be a people whose sympathies and influence are to be for economic and social justice for the working poor, for the uneducated, for the disenfranchised of the societies where they live. Christians ought to favor public policy that allows people who labor to have some reasonable share in the goods and services their labor produces. James is on the side of the poor. He is more concerned that the laborers in the field receive their wage than in defending an abstract principle of free enterprise economics...” Duane Warden “Rich and Poor in James...” http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3817/is_200006/ai_n8922100/print

That same author, I think rightly, indicates that Christians in particular and even our country as a whole do a fairly good job providing for the indigent poor, the destitute.

We have food banks, clothing supplies, even homeless shelters.

Where we fail too often is with the working poor.

We go into our grocery stores expecting to find any produce we desire and usually complain about the price being unfair.

To whom is it unfair?

85 percent of the fruits and vegetables produced in this country were hand harvested and/or cultivated.

Without these workers we wouldn't have the produce we rely on.

In return for their labor, the majority of farm-workers earn annual wages of less than \$7,500. Although wage rates for farm-workers have gone up over the last decade, when they are adjusted for inflation we find that farm-workers' real wages have decreased 5% in that time.

According to U.S. Department of Agriculture's own data, agriculture is one of the most accident-prone industries in the United States.

In 1990 The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) found field sanitation violations in 69 percent of its field inspections.

The Environmental Protection Agency estimates that 300,000 farm workers suffer acute pesticide poisoning each year.

Migrant workers don't generally earn enough to pay for health care, and they almost never have health insurance.

They may also lack transportation to the clinic or, since they don't receive sick leave, be afraid of losing wages or even losing their jobs if they take time off to seek health care.

The U.S. Public Health Service funds some migrant health centers to help provide care to farm-workers, but not nearly enough to meet the need.

The circumstances of farm-worker children are particularly poignant. Poverty and migration make it difficult for farm-worker children to create a different future for themselves.

The Fair Labor Standards Act sets age 12 as the legal limit for farm work, with exemptions available for children as young as 10 or 11. Studies have shown that many children under age 12 continue to do farm work.

And hard data says these children are even more subject to work-related accidents than are adults.

<http://www.ncfh.org/factsheets.php>

I use the illustrations of migrant workers only because it is so close to home.

James says the cries of the unpaid wages and the unjustly-treated workers cry out against us.

They say you can't take it with you.

But the truth is that what we have, if ill-gained or misused, will be represented on the other side – it will testify against us. (Blanchard, 337)

James says not only have you hoarded and defrauded but you have also indulged.

James 5:5 “You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter.”

“You have fattened yourselves” means you have more than cared for yourselves in contrast to caring for any others

This life of luxury is lived at the expense others AND with an unseeing eye and unfeeling heart toward the plight of others.

We tend to compare themselves to those who have more.

But James' perspective is from the eyes of the poor who see these “rich” as living in luxury.

One man said, “It is indulgence in the face of suffering!”
(Davids, 117)

Dr. Blomberg wrote, “It is not capitalism with its goal of profit that James condemns; it is the **selfishness** that accompanies any economic philosophy.” (Blomberg, 289)

God says it this way: Ezekiel 16:49 “Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy.”

In 2005 contributions to 700 Protestant mission agencies, including denominational, interdenominational and independent agencies, was \$5.2 billion.

Americans spent as much as \$13.7 billion on Valentine's Day 2006.

\$14 billion was spent on perfumes and related products.

The size of American homes has been rising for the last 35 years even though the family size has been declining.

In 1980 the average home size was 2000 square feet, in 2006 it was nearly 2500 square feet.

"Americans spend \$22 billion a year on toys. While we have less than 4% of the world's kids we buy 40% of the toys.

We spent \$705.0 billion in entertainment in 2004.

U.S. consumers spend an estimated \$50 billion a year on footwear"

In 1933, at the depth of the Great Depression, Protestants were giving 3.2% of their income to their churches.

By 2005, when Americans were over 554% richer, after taxes and inflation, than in the Great Depression, Protestants were giving 2.6% of their incomes to their churches.

Source: www.emptytomb.org

Listen to Jesus: Matthew 6:19-21 "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Luke 12:33 "Sell your possessions and give to the poor.

Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys.

4,325,556 - This is the number of children under 5 who have died since the beginning of 2008

Most die from preventable poverty conditions and many are in areas where they have never heard the good news of Jesus Christ.

Source: www.emptytomb.org

I read, "There is no sin in merely being rich; where sin exists among the rich, it arises from the manner in which wealth is acquired, the

spirit which it tends to engender in the heart (which we looked at last week), and the way it is used.” (A. Barnes in Motyer, 169)

What do I do?

Create margin in my life to be able to give money away.

Buy fewer toys, eat out less, change my entertainment habits (do we really need larger TVs, the latest Play Station, more movies, more expensive cell phones, etc.

An experiment might be to see how much we can save each week to give away. Bring the children into the experiment. We rotate who gets to decide who gets the money. Consciously think of both the destitute and the working poor.

Weigh in on the side of creating a more level playing field for the working poor.

Minimum wage issues; health care, education opportunities, etc.

It is easy to sound like a “bleeding-heart liberal” when you start thinking about these verses.

Maybe National health care is a lousy plan that will reduce the quality of health care but even if my health care is lower quality, will it not mean at least some health care for the many without?

Maybe there’s a better solution but we’ve been talking for years about the free-market system solving the problem while in fact many still go without.

No, I don’t like the promiscuous culture and easy divorce that has led to a significant increase in single moms and disadvantaged kids, but lamenting those conditions doesn’t change the fact that many of those moms need child care, many of those kids need better education.

Who’s going to provide quality child-care for the have-to-work moms? Who’s going to tutor their kids?

I’m not an economist but I think free-market economies, with proper restraints, are the best for everyone.

But no economic system is perfect because people aren't perfect.

And who picks up the pieces, who provides for those who are left out or even those who fail?

I don't like being on the "scrooge" side of so many discussions about providing for the impoverished and working poor.

My liberal friends often sound more "Christian" than I do.

I know that the solutions to these problems aren't simple, I don't have the answers, but I can't pretend they don't exist; I can't do nothing – My Lord won't allow it and if my heart was right neither could I.

What else can we do? We can invest time in helping even one person or one family not just with a hand out but a hand up.

And certainly we can seek from God a change of heart – a heart of compassion.

Jesus said, Luke 6:36 "Be merciful (compassionate), just as your Father is merciful (compassionate)."

Jesus claimed to be God, the bearer of good news about the kingdom of God.

What was the first indication of his credibility? His actions! When asked if he was the one to come, Jesus pointed to his actions, "the blind see again, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear..." His actions were the source of his credibility. (McNeil, et al, 119)

In James we have seen that the true test of discipleship, of belonging to God, is in our actions.

Compassion is from the Latin *pati* and *cum* which mean "to suffer with."

Compassion is more than tenderheartedness.

We are often temporarily impressed with some sad story and we feel a certain sadness.

But compassion is to truly suffer with someone and that is contrary to our natural selves.

Suffering with someone means “we share in the other’s vulnerability, enter with him or her into the experience of weakness and powerlessness, become part of uncertainty, and give up control and self-determination.” (McNeil, Morrison, Nouwen, *Compassion*, 14)

One man said, “Compassion is not a snob gone slumming. Anybody can save his conscience by an occasional foray into knitting for an (old folks home). Did you ever take a real trip down inside the broken heart of a friend? To feel the sob of the soul – the raw, red crucible of emotional agony? To have this become almost as much yours as that of your soul-crushed neighbor? Then, to sit down with him – and silently weep? This is the beginning of compassion.” (Jess Moody *Quote-Unquote*, p66)

Luke 6:36 “Be merciful (compassionate), just as your Father is merciful (compassionate).”

Today, all I’m asking you to do is truly pray about it and talk about it in your family or among other friends.

Honestly ask the question, “How would God have me change – I can’t solve the world’s crises, but I can do something – what is it?”

AND I urge you to read one or more of the following books.
I have placed the information in the sermon notes to be found online.

Books:

Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life by McNeill, Morrison and Nouwen

Rich Christians in an age of Hunger by Ron Sider

Neither Poverty nor Riches by Craig Blomberg

Article - “Rich and Poor in James...” by Duane Warden

http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3817/is_200006/ai_n8922100/print

- Other notes on the next page -

OTHER NOTES:

“People who hoard wealth are not only demonstrating utterly false priorities; they are also depriving others of their very life.” (Moo, 214)

Jeremiah 22:13 “Woe to him who builds his palace by unrighteousness, his upper rooms by injustice, making his countrymen work for nothing, not paying them for their labor.

Malachi 3:5 So I will come near to you for judgment. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive aliens of justice, but do not fear me,” says the LORD Almighty.

James 5:3 “last days”

“Last days” – James knows they are in the last days – Jesus ushered in the last days – it is certainly coming – there is no excuse for not knowing. But instead the “rich” continue to gain and hoard as if nothing had changed – like partying on the Titanic after it had struck the iceberg.

“Here is where it becomes essential to understand the eschatological world-view of the NT. We live in the last days and have done so since Pentecost (cf. Ac 2:17). Christ could return at any point. Where is our treasure? Are we laying it up on earth so that we might live in comfort, planning for a long life here (see cf. Lk 12:13-21), or do we focus more on amassing treasure in heaven with God, and merely grateful for the blessings he has given us here and now? The condemnation is not for owning wealth *per se*, but for hoarding rather than using it for kingdom purposes. As Johnson observes, “‘the last days’ . . . are not the anticipated retirement years of the rich, but the time of God’s judgment.” (Blomberg, 288)

James 5:5 You have lived on earth in luxury and self-indulgence. You have fattened yourselves in the day of slaughter.

“The NAB translates, “you lived in wanton luxury;” the NLT, “satisfying your every whim;” and Moffatt, “you have reveled on earth and plunged into dissipation.” Weymouth speaks of “profligate lives;” Goodspeed, of living “luxuriously and voluptuously;” and Rotherham, of having “luxuriated upon the land and run riot.” (Blomberg, 290)

“Luxury” extravagant comfort – the softness of luxury. (Motyer, 167)
A life without self-denial, not necessarily corrupt in every way, but certainly offering no resistance to sin where there is promise of comfort and enjoyment.” (Motyer, 167)

James 5:6 You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you.

“It is easy to find examples today of the non-Christian rich who exploit the poor, and who sometimes go extra hard on believers. Many individual Christians have poignant stories to tell about just such behavior by their employers. But the problem goes far beyond the individual level. Governments around the world almost by definition claim to make decisions based on “national interest,” which usually translates into a disproportionate interest in the richest classes of that nation. Multinational corporations may look for the cheapest overseas labor so they can make the greatest profit, whether or not they pay a fair and decent wage and irrespective of the impact on the job market in the communities in which their headquarters or major Western plants are based. In many parts of the Two-Thirds world, they (or wealthy indigenous private owners, the local equivalent of the Mafia, or the government itself) own vast tracts of land that are cultivated by “guest workers” for substandard wages. Migrant workers in the U.S. often face similar injustices, made all the more complicated by the fact that some—but only some—of them are also illegal aliens. Even among full-fledged American citizens, the buying power of workers (i.e., wages evaluated based on cost of living in any given location) varies greatly from one part of the country to the next, with inequities based on race, country of origin, gender and marital status still

alarmingly sizable. Wall's words are worth pondering: "If James's brand of piety is taken seriously and at face value. . . a substantial portion of the North American church would become quite uncomfortable with the ease by which it has accommodated the upward economic mobility of liberal democracy while trying to follow after its downwardly mobile Lord."

But there are even more uncomfortable applications that should be made. How many upper- or middle-class Western Christians have so many extra, largely unused clothes, so that, were it not for mothballs or their equivalent, they *would* have become moth-eaten? How many have other needless possessions, even investments, that are not being used for much of anything, and certainly not for the Lord's work, that would be better off given to the needy? How many, if they were to be ruthlessly honest, live a lifestyle perilously close to that of v. 5—of luxury and self-indulgence? Then there is the enormous waste of food left uneaten and thrown away in restaurants, of the quantities of garbage thrown out that could be recycled, of planned obsolescence of products so that entirely new ones must be bought rather than old ones repaired (or the prohibitive cost of repairs making it cheaper just to buy a new item). A generation ago it was almost unheard of to raze an entire building just to put another one on the same site, or to level a whole shopping center to replace it with a new one, or to tear down an entire athletic stadium just to build a larger, fancier one, but today all of these are common occurrences. How many churches think that the only realistic option when they outgrow one facility is to build a bigger, more up-scale one, with thousands and even millions of dollars diverted from truly helping the world's destitute, physically and spiritually? One shudders to think of the potential judgment of God being stored up by so many examples of profligate waste.

Of course, one dare not minimize the differences between a largely capitalist world today and the ancient Mediterranean economy of "limited good" (the belief that there was a fixed amount of wealth in the world such that, if one person had more, someone else necessarily had less). Many investments today are highly beneficial when their earnings continue to increase and are regularly used for God's kingdom work at home and abroad. A little bit of research can enable investors to determine companies that make reasonable efforts not to defraud workers, exploit the poor, or rape the environment. Similar research can enable consumers to make

godlier, wiser choices when deciding which of several brands of some product to purchase. In 5:1-6 James hardly condemns savings or investing but rather *hoarding*. But he comes down hard on that selfishness and then even harder on lavish expenditures for self-indulgence.” Blomberg, 303-6)

On “Compassion:”

An excellent short book: McNeil, Morrison, Nouwen,
Compassion, 1982

Luke 6:36 “Be merciful (compassionate), just as your Father is merciful (compassionate).”

Compassion is from the Latin *pati* and *cum* which mean to suffer with. Compassion is more than tenderheartedness.

We are often temporarily impressed with some sad story and feel a sadness.

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Suffering with someone means “we share in the other’s vulnerability, enter with him or her into the experience of weakness and powerlessness, become part of uncertainty, and give up control and self-determination.” (*Compassion*, 14)

God is compassionate – he came to be with us.

Competition, not compassion is our main motivation in life.

We define ourselves by our differences from others. We are more or less intelligent, good looking, creative, wealthy, strong, etc.

What we have achieved are the trophies that distinguish us.

We imagine we can “forge our own identities; that we are the collective impressions of our surroundings; that we are the trophies and distinctions we have won.” (*Compassion*, 20)

Jesus gives us a new identity that enables us to say, “I am not the esteem I can collect through competition, but the love I have freely received from God.” (*Compassion*, 21)

Then we are free to enter into the lives of others – to have real compassion.

Our lives are lived upwardly – we pull ourselves up, we climb the ladder, more and more, better and better.
Jesus stooped and he calls us to stoop

“Here we see what compassion means. It is **not** bending toward the underprivileged from a privileged position; it is not a reaching out from on high to those who are less fortunate below; it is not a gesture of sympathy or pity for those who fail to make it in the upward pull. On the contrary, compassion means going directly to those people and places where suffering is most acute and building a home there.
(Compassion 26)

“Compassion is not a snob gone slumming. Anybody can salve his conscience by an occasional foray into knitting for an (old folks home). Did you ever take a real trip down inside the broken heart of a friend? To feel the sob of the soul – the raw, red crucible of emotional agony? To have this become almost as much yours as that of your soul-crushed neighbor? Then, to sit down with him – and silently weep? This is the beginning of compassion.” (Jess Moody *Quote-Unquote*, p66)

Compassion is not just what we do but who we are in Christ.

When Jesus came he said the kingdom of God has come. The kingdom that is **to be** when Jesus returns **has already** invaded the present.

Through God’s people we now see in part what will be true in full when Jesus returns.

“The future has already begun and is revealed each time strangers are welcomed, the naked are clothed, the sick and prisoners are visited, and oppression is overcome. Through these grateful actions the first glimpses of a new heaven and a new earth can be seen.”
(McNeil, Morrison, Nouwen, *Compassion*, 134)

Jesus claimed to be God, the bearer of good news about the kingdom of God. What was the first indication of his credibility? His actions!

When asked if he was the one to come, Jesus pointed to his actions, “the blind see again, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear...” His actions were the source of his credibility. (McNeil, et al, 119)

In James we have seen that the true test of discipleship, of belonging to God, is in our actions.

Luke 6:36 “Be merciful (compassionate), just as your Father is merciful (compassionate).”