

God's Compassion for the Poor

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Good morning.

My name is Carrie Moulton and I'm a member of the Oakland Women's Little Faith Group. And the first reading today is from Jeremiah chapter 9 verses 23 and 24.

A reading from the prophet Jeremiah. This is what the Lord says. Let not the wise boast of their wisdom, or the strong boast of their strength, or the rich boast of their riches.

But let the one who boasts boast about this. That they have the understanding to know me, that I am the Lord who exercises kindness, justice, and righteousness on earth.

[1 : 12] For in these I delight, declares the Lord. And then a reading from 2 Kings chapter 4 verses 1 through 6.

The wife of a man from the company of the prophets cried out to Elijah, Your servant, my husband, is dead, and you know that he revered the Lord.

But now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as his slaves. Elisha replied to her, How can I help you? Tell me, what do you have in your house?

Your servant has nothing there at all, she said, except a small jar of olive oil. Elisha said, Go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars.

Don't ask for just a few. Pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side. She left him and shut the door behind her and her sons.

[2 : 15] They brought the jars to her, and she kept pouring. When all the jars were full, she said to her son, Bring me another one. But he replied, There is not a jar left.

Then the oil stopped flowing. She went and told the man of God, and he said, Go, sell the oil, and pay your debts. You and your sons can live on what is left.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Alright, good morning Christ Church. The spirit is clearly moving today. I heard a few of you clapping.

And I think I even saw a couple of you move. So that was cool. This is, as you've seen and you've heard so far, this is Compassion Sunday. And it's our hope to just help you engage with the compassionate heart of God for you, as well as for the global poor.

And we're going to be inviting you to partner and to build friendships with children in some of the most vulnerable and dangerous situations in the world, so that they can be released.

[3 : 22] They can be lifted out of poverty in Jesus' name. And that we can have a part in helping them reach their full redemptive potential. You guys excited about that? So I want to just acknowledge my imposter syndrome right at the very top of this sermon.

Because some of you, I know, have advanced degrees and experience in things like macroeconomics and poverty reduction, social development, and public policy.

Others of you maybe don't have those credentials, but you have a large heart of compassion for the poor. And next to you, I feel like the Grinch, you know, whose heart is like three times too small.

So I just want to say at the top, it's such a humbling thing to be the pastor of so many smart and caring people. And I have so much to learn from you today.

But despite all the things that I'm lacking both in my head and in my heart, we're doing Compassion Sunday right now. And why are we doing that? Well, Andrew said earlier, we, as a church, we've committed ourselves to giving 10% of our general fund budget to Mercy and Missions every year.

[4 : 31] We gave \$154,000 away last year. And this is now our third year in a row of tithing our income as a church. And I'm really proud to be a part of a church that does that.

And, you know, we know that locally, the Bay Area has a vast disparity of wealth and of income inequality. And so part of that giving goes to address needs to support local organizations that are working with the poor, like Loaves and Fishes, Harbor House, Care Portal, Foss of the City, Project Peace, and others.

We want to give our time, our talent, and certainly our treasures to support local poor. But we also want to be a both and church, both local and global, both for the city and for the world, both giving to people who are near and giving to people who are far away.

And so this past spring, our church gave \$25,000 to an existing church. I don't know how good your geography is, but picture Guatemala.

And north and east of Guatemala City, there's a little church called Iglesia Bautista Nazaret. And we funded them and are partnering with them to launch a new child development center in partnership with Compassion International.

[5 : 54] You might be wondering why Guatemala. Well, 59% of Guatemalans live below the poverty line. There's a high level of violence, insecurity, and inequality that leads to poverty, crime.

And some of the lowest social development indicators in Latin America. Guatemala has the youngest population in Latin America. And the vast majority of those young people have insufficient training and job opportunities.

So when this opportunity was put before us, we said, great, we don't need to really look any further. So I want you to just imagine this young, vulnerable church that we have come across.

They're set within a community of the most severe extreme poverty. And this church is full of people like us. They've got a vision. They love kids.

They want to serve their community. But they need a partnership to be resourced to fulfill the mission that God has given to them. And so Christ Church has stepped in to become their partner.

[6 : 57] And now as a result of this new Child Development Center, there's 200 kids that are part of that program that are there and enrolled and waiting to be sponsored.

And that's where you come in today. So if you already have a way, if you already have a means or a vehicle for releasing people from poverty in Jesus' name, especially children, I want to say to you, wonderful.

Keep going. And don't let what we're doing here get in the way of that at all. But if you've not yet found a meaningful way to serve the global poor, both relationally and financially, then our goal is to encourage you today to sponsor a child and just take a step of faith.

Think about the \$43 this next month that you would have otherwise spent probably on yourself or on some sort of non-essential thing. And instead of keeping that for yourself, just give it to the Lord and let him use it to transform the life of a child and the life of a family and the life of a community. So that's why I'm here. Usually I don't tell you the application of the sermon at the very beginning. But that's why we're here and that's where I'm going. And now I want to open up God's word to 2 Kings chapter 4 because this amazing story tells us about the plight of the poor, the compassion of God, and the generosity of God's people.

[8 : 30] And I want to start just thinking for a moment together about the plight of the poor. If you look there at verse 1, it says, Just for context, this was a very dark time in Israel.

There was much religious pluralism. The people of God were turning away from the true and living God to serve all of these counterfeit gods. And we're told in 1 Kings chapter 19, God says that, I've reserved for myself 7,000 people.

Out of all of Israel, I've reserved for myself 7,000 people who have not bowed their knee to Baal. And this man apparently was part of that tiny, tiny remnant among the people of God who was living in awe of Yahweh and who was a prophet who was faithful to the word of God.

And evidently, he was not rich as people count wealth. To use the words of Jesus, he was rich toward God. Right? He had stored up all of his treasure in heaven.

And he was seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, trusting that God was going to provide all the other things that he needed. And the problem is that this man died. And apparently, he died pretty young.

[9 : 54] And he's left his widow behind him in a crisis. And so I want you to notice her destitution and desperation. Here's this single mother.

She's facing a future with no inheritance. The only way that her family debts can be paid off in that time was for her two sons to become indentured servants.

So at one stroke, she loses her husband. She loses her financial resources and her inheritance.

And she's about to lose her sons. Now, just zoom out for a minute.

And think about the way that God, in his wisdom, provided all these laws and all these customs for Israel that created this elaborate social safety net.

So that families would be responsible to provide care when hard times came. Right? So that the poor, the marginalized, widows, orphans, and the elderly would always be taken care of in Israel.

[10:57] If you just look at the Torah, the first five books of the Bible, right? Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. You'll find these amazing laws there that you don't really find in any other ancient cultures.

There's laws about leveret marriage and the kinsmen redeemer so that widows would have the opportunity to stay in their family and not lose their inheritance. There are laws telling people not to harvest all the way to the edge of their property, but to leave some margin on the edge of their field so that the poor can come and glean off of their extra.

There are laws there, usury laws that strictly regulate lending practices so that no one in Israel would ever get stuck in debt.

There's an amazing law about sabbatical years where vulnerable people were protected from overwork and exploitation. There's this one particular law called the Year of Jubilee that made sure that no one in Israel ever, ever, ever got stuck in generational poverty.

And all of these amazing laws were designed to keep people out of debt bondage and keep them within the care of their family unit. But this widow, for some reason, we're not told, for some reason she drops through that elaborate social safety net, right?

[12:17] It's kind of to be assumed that this time in Israel was so dark spiritually that this safety net has fallen apart socially. And perhaps she doesn't have any relatives, any close kin that could protect her, or maybe both.

But in this story, there's none of the debt forgiveness that you would expect. And you kind of look at this creditor as, I think of him as kind of this unsavory guy who in this vulnerable moment comes to take advantage of this woman who's poor financially in that she has no money.

She's poor socially in that she has no family. She's poor relationally in that her two sons are about to be taken away from her. And she's poor spiritually because she's being stripped of her dignity as somebody who's made in the image of God.

Do you see that fourfold poverty? It's not just one-dimensional. It's four dimensions of poverty. And how does the prophet Elisha respond to that four-dimensional poverty?

Does he come along as somebody on the left, somebody part of the blue team, and says, well, ma'am, I can see that your poverty is the result of social forces beyond your control. There's obviously some prejudice, some oppression here, some inequities in the system, economic deprivation.

[13:35] And so what we need is more socialism, more taxation, more redistribution of goods, right? Does he say that? No, he doesn't say that. Does he come along as somebody on the right, somebody part of the red team, and say, well, ma'am, your poverty is really the result of individual choices?

It's most likely your lack of clarity and character that's led to poor moral decisions, unwise practices, and a breakdown of your family. And so what we need here is more capitalism, more innovation, more bootstrapping.

Is that what he says to her? No, I'm having fun. I'm having more fun than you are, I think. Lighten up, folks. Those categories obviously didn't exist.

Red, blue, left, right, in Elisha's day. But what I want to point out is that he's not so much concerned with how she got to be poor. He's not talking about whatever bad harvests happen, whatever bad decisions were made in business, whatever bad creditor this is, it's part of this maybe larger broken system.

What he simply is concerned about is that she is poor. And he can see that she's financially, socially, relationally, spiritually destitute and desperate.

[14:50] And so what does he say to her in verse two? He says, how can I help you? How can I help you? In fact, let's say, how can I help you together? How can I help you?

Now, verse seven says that the prophet Elisha is a man of God. And to be a man or a woman of God means that you understand and know that God is the burning center of reality. And it's to know and to agree with the prophet Jeremiah that we're not gonna let the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches. That's not what godliness is about. That triad of wisdom and strength and riches represents the fundamental grounds and primary avenues for self-enhancement and self-security. No, he says, let the one who boasts about this, that they have the understanding to know me, that I am the Lord who exercises kindness, justice, and righteousness where?

[15 : 50] On the earth, for in these things I delight. And that triad of kindness or compassion, justice, and righteousness, that represents not only the chief characteristics of the Lord's way, but it also represents the chief expectations that the Lord has for his people.

And so because Elisha is a man of God, because he understands and knows the Lord, he wants to live and act in alignment with who the Lord is and what the Lord does. He wants to put kindness, justice, and righteousness to work in the very place where God puts it to work, that is on the earth, in real time, in real history, in the lives of real people. And so if we want to be men of God and women of God, and to live a life that's lined up with what the Lord delights in, we simply need to learn to respond to people's complex poverty with five simple words.

How can I help you? That's the plight of the poor, okay? I also want to talk about the compassion of God.

[17 : 05] The compassion of God. In verse two, Elisha replied to her, how can I help you? And then he says, tell me what do you have in your house? And so instead of focusing on what she does not have, he says, well, let's take a look at what you do have and let's work with that.

And how does she respond? She says, well, your servant has nothing at all. Like, I am, like, desperately poor. But then she says, well, wait a second, I do have a little bit of olive oil. And so Elisha, this man of God, he says, yes, and actually you have even a little bit more than that. You've got this faith community. You've got this Israelite neighborhood around you. And so he says in verse three, he says, Elisha, Elisha said, go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars. Don't ask for just a few. These neighbors of yours, they should know the Torah. They should know the Lord's command that there are to be no poor people in the land. And in fact, your problem is their problem.

And so I want you to go vulnerably ask for help. Ask them to put their resources at your disposal because what is going to most humanize them? What's going to most bring out the image of God in them is to help someone in need.

[18 : 18] And so it says in verse four, then I want you to go inside and shut the door behind you and your sons. Pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side.

It says that I don't want you to be passive. I want you to be active. I want you to work with the little, meager, insufficient amount of oil that's just clinging to the bottom of that jar. And I want you to start pouring it with faith in God's compassion for you.

And how does she respond to this prophetic word from God? Does she say, ah, it's impossible. That's the most ridiculous thing I've heard all week.

This does not fit with my theology. That is not how God operates. I love this verse in the epistle of James. James is a writer of the New Testament.

He's actually the brother of Jesus, and he wrote this letter, and he says in James chapter two, verse five, he says, listen, my dear brothers and sisters, has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised to those who love him?

[19 : 25] And I think this woman is someone who's poor in the eyes of the world but rich in faith. And so it says that she left him, in verse five, and shut the door behind her and her sons.

They brought the jars to her, and she kept pouring. And when all the jars were full, she said to her son, bring me another one. But he replied, there was not a jar left. Then the oil stopped flowing. Now this is an amazing thing, this abundant overflow of oil. And what does this abundant overflow of oil reveal about God, about who God is and what God does?

The first thing it reveals to me is that God could have done a much more efficient miracle. Couldn't he have done a much more efficient miracle? Like he could have said, okay, go home, open the door, and inside you're gonna find all the oil that you need prepackaged.

Or he could have, even better than that, he could have said, go home, you're gonna find a pile of money, and you can take that to the creditor, and that's gonna save you from all this jarring, storing, transporting, and selling of all of this oil.

[20 : 35] Or even better, he could have said, you know what, your creditor's gonna wake up tomorrow morning and find a pile of money on his doorstep, a huge bag of cash with a note on it that says, love Elisha the widow and her two sons.

Now that would be an efficient miracle. So the question for me is, why is God's compassion so inefficient? Why is this act of compassion from God so protracted and so elaborate?

Why is he involving the community of God's people in the giving of these jars? And why is he involving this woman and these two sons in the pouring of the oil? It's precisely because of this.

He wants them to see how God provides. He wants them to see that the oil comes, and it just keeps coming and coming and coming and coming.

The jars keep showing up and showing up and showing up, and the oil just keeps pouring out.

There's this abundant, overflowing compassion that's coming from God for you.

[21 : 38] And so in verse seven, it says, she went and told the man of God, and he said, go sell the oil and pay your debts. You and your sons can live on what is left. You see, God took this small amount, and he turned their scarcity into an abundance.

He took that financial, relational, social, spiritual poverty, and he reversed it completely. Right, financially, the proceeds of the sale are enough to pay all of their debts.

Relationally, the surplus will allow her to support her sons and to have a family. Socially, all the borrowing of these jars have connected her back with the community of faith, and spiritually, her dignity and her humanity have been restored.

And you see, God's compassion here in this abundant, overflowing oil is not just a cool moment for us to marvel at, but really, it's a signpost to what God intends to do on a cosmic scale.

Right, when you read the Old Testament prophets, they talk about the coming day of the Lord. They talk about the coming of God's Messiah. And when they talk about that day, they talk about it in terms of abundance and overflow.

[22 : 56] Joel, the prophet Joel says this. He says, I am sending you grain, new wine, and olive oil enough to satisfy you fully. The Lord says, the threshing floors will be filled with grain, and the vats will overflow with new wine and oil.

And in that day, the mountains will drip new wine, and the hills will flow with milk, and all the ravines of Judah will run with water. In other words, when Messiah comes, God's compassion will be embodied.

God's compassion will come in the flesh, and there is going to be, in that day, an enoughness.

There's going to be a fullness. There's going to be an overflow and a wide-scale satisfaction.

And is that not what we begin to see in the Gospels, in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ? When he comes along to these hungry people, and he takes five little loaves and two measly fish, and he begins to multiply them so that everyone who was hungry ate, and it says they were satisfied, and there was plenty left over.

Jesus cries out in the temple. He says in John 7, he says, let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.

[24 : 20] He's suggesting that there's an abundant, overflowing, unending, inexhaustible supply that comes from God through Jesus. And, you know, the question for us is, why exactly did Jesus come?

Was it to satisfy our hunger? Was it to quench our thirst? Was it to meet all of our physical needs? Or was it to address our spiritual poverty?

And what I see in the story is that the same God of compassion, who paid off the debts of this widow so that she would not have to give up her sons, that same God gave up his son.

Gave up his son, Jesus, to pay off our debt of sin that we could never, ever pay on our own. And that, that moment in history is the ultimate act of God's compassion.

Right? Jesus left the riches of heaven. He entered into the scarcity of this world. And on the cross, he experienced a spiritual impoverishment beyond what any of us could ever dare to imagine.

[25 : 33] Jesus became utterly destitute and utterly desperate to bring about a debt forgiveness of our sins and to accomplish the total reversal of our spiritual and moral poverty, to purchase our

freedom and to restore our lives.

The Apostle Paul says it like this in 2 Corinthians 8. He says, For you know that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor so that you, through his poverty, might become rich.

And Jesus' empty tomb, Jesus' resurrected body, is itself also a signpost that a day is coming where there's going to be no more poverty.

There's going to be no more scarcity or emptiness or death, but all will be riches and abundance and fullness and life. That's what the resurrection tells us. That day is coming.

And so the question, in light of Jesus Christ, in light of his death and his resurrection, the question is not how much compassion can God give and can God provide enough of it for us?

[26 : 41] The question, rather, is are there enough empty jars? Are there enough empty vessels for us to receive the endless supply of God's compassion? And will we be able to hold all that God has and wants to give us?

Does that make sense?

Does that make sense?

So this story tells us about the plight of the poor. It tells us something about the great compassion of God that we see made flesh in Jesus Christ. And finally, it tells us something about the generosity of God's people.

And I want to just close with this by saying that my hope and our prayer is that Christ's church will be a family that's full of men and women of God who have been changed by the compassion of God in Jesus Christ.

[27 : 51] So that our boast is not in the wisdom that we have and the strength that we have and the riches that we have, though those things abound among us.

But that our boast would be that we know the Lord. And therefore, our deepest longing is to imitate him and to embody his kindness and justice and righteousness on the earth.

So that we, like Elisha, say, how can I help you? So that we, like those neighbors, say, do you need another jar? Could you use my jar?

And so what I want to do in closing is just to ask for your help and really ask for your jar on behalf of these kids that don't have a voice to ask for it that you see around you right now.

There's 180 kids represented in these packets. We have 20 more kids on our website. And I just want to talk about them for a moment. UNICEF tells us that there are 1 billion children globally who are multidimensionally poor, meaning that they're without access to education, health, housing, nutrition, sanitation, or water.

[29 : 06] And out of those 1 billion children, 365 million of them live in extreme poverty, which is that they live on less than \$1.25 per day.

So over 40% of the global population is under the age of 25, and 85% of the world's youth are living in low-income countries. And this is why I love Compassion International.

This is why I hope that you'll come to love them too, because they look at that. They look at the fact that of all the impoverished people in the world, about half of them are kids. They're the most vulnerable and dependent people on the planet, and yet they're the least able to fend for themselves.

And so Compassion has said, well, there's something not right about that. We should do something as God's people in response to that. And so this past year alone, Compassion has served 2.3 million children in 29 countries.

They've empowered 8,200 local churches to care for those kids. They've given \$11.5 million in medical interventions, surgeries, injury treatment, and trauma counseling.

[30 : 17] They've given \$21.2 million in relief for families, including food packages and cash transfers in response to the global food crisis. And they've also given \$47.5 million in disaster relief.

And when they do that, they're doing that year over year in Jesus' name, because they know that children matter to Jesus, and because they believe, like we believe, that Jesus is the one person in the whole universe that has the power to release these kids from poverty, and to nourish them and to nurture them and to transform their lives for eternity.

Amen? So maybe you're asking, how can I help today? How can I sponsor a child? I simply want to call upon you to do for one what you wish you could do for everyone.

Right? Don't we wish we could do something for every one of those children that we just heard about? But what I want to do is call you to do for one child what you wish you could do for every child. And I just want to show you real quick, we should have a slide with three kids.

Constance mentioned this earlier, three kids that we've supported. Miriam and Adriana and Stephen. We also had a child in Jali in India, but the Indian government shut that program down.

[31 : 43] And so we are, in fact, Walter just gave me this, like a few minutes ago. Today we're going to be sponsoring Juan. And I don't know if he chose this kid because it's like my name, but that's pretty cool.

You know, so I'm excited about Juan. I don't know anything about him yet, but this is who we're going to sponsor today. And, you know, I love for each household at Christchurch to sponsor one child, but I also want to say you don't just need to limit yourself to one.

Kids and youth, I hope that you'll beg your parents to sponsor a child your same age and ask them to download the app this afternoon. It's a great place where you can share letters and pictures with your kids.

There are, as I said, 180 packets here, 20 on our website. All these kids are waking up tomorrow morning going, do I have a sponsor yet? Do I have a sponsor yet? And what I want to say is that we could do it.

We could do it because we spend money on coffee, we spend money on lunch out, we spend money on entertainment, at least I do. And I don't need all those things. And if we would just find \$43 a month, we could provide food, clean water, medical care, education, life skills, and most importantly, the opportunity for these kids to learn about Jesus, to learn the Bible, to learn how to have a relationship with God, which is the thing they most need in this world.

[33 : 09] And some of you might be like, man, this is kind of uncomfortable. I'm feeling a little pressure from the pastor right now, and this is why I never really come to church. But, you know, it would be a great compliment to me if you went out from here today and you said, man, I went to church today, and can you believe the pastor asked me to change the life of a child for eternity.

What nerve. I mean, who is this guy? I would love it if you complained about that. So here's some instructions for what we're gonna do next, and pay very close attention because this is super important.

We're gonna take five to seven minutes now, and in just a minute, you're gonna stand, and it's gonna be a little awkward getting in and out of our pews, but we're gonna move around. You can go look at packets.

They're in the back. They're up front. They're on the sides, and I wanna encourage some of you, because I know you, don't overthink this. Don't create an algorithm trying to figure out the best match between you and the child.

Just pick one and trust God and do it. You don't need to take time to pray and say, God, should I lift this child out of poverty? The answer is yes. The answer is yes. Now, parents, I would encourage you to look now, and you can come, you know, get your child later and involve them in that process if you'd like, but once you choose a packet, you're gonna fill it out with the sponsorship card on the back, and if you wanna use the QR code, you can do that, but please still fill out this sponsorship card with your name and just write QR, and once you've done that, there are pins all over the sanctuary.

[34 : 42] Once you've done that, you can drop it at the welcome table here in the back. Our youth, thank you so much, youth, for manning our table. You can give them your sponsorship card.

They're gonna give you a raffle ticket because we have a Guatemalan-themed lunch in our community hall in a few minutes, and if you stick around till 12.30, we're gonna raffle off some cool stuff. After the service, parents, you can get your kids, and you can bring them back in to look at whatever packets are remaining, and as I said, if you're online, there are 20 packets on our website if you'd like to use that.

In three to four weeks' time, you're gonna receive a letter, and then you can begin writing to your child. Now, very important, do not take this home. Do not take this home because this is this child's only packet, and they're gonna get completely lost in the shuffle, and you're gonna make life really hard for them in trying to help them, so just decide today and leave all the packets, and especially the sponsorship cards here, and leave your sponsorship card here.

Take the rest of the packet home with you. But here's my prayer. My prayer is that through us, these kids that have only one jar of oil, and maybe even just only a little bit of oil in that jar, that

many of them would wake up tomorrow morning and see, God filled many, many more jars for me, and he did it.

He showed us his compassion through his people. That's my prayer. And may God make it so. In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

[36 : 19] Amen. Let's stand, and you can feel free to walk around the sanctuary as we listen to music. Holy Spirit. family Eric.