

The Compassionate Life

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[0 : 0 0] I want to preach on a verse from 1 John chapter 3 and verse 17 and there's a reason for this and that is for those of you who are not aware of this we are preaching a set of sermons under the generic title of the good life and within that we're preaching to a number of themes and today the theme is the good life living compassionately in 1 John chapter 3 and verse 17 we read these words if anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them how can the love of God be in that person yesterday my newspaper arrived and in the weekend supplement they had invited comment from a number of people who are called Generation Z trigger warning if you're from Generation Z you might not identify with this but the question they were asked was what would be your relatively modest quote relatively modest dreams for your life in the future bear in mind that not one of these young people at the time earned more than 28,000 pounds per annum the journalist concluded that basically all these people with a salary range between 18 and 28,000 pounds basically they all had the same I quote modest dreams let me tell you what they are firstly they wanted a big house with a big garden they wanted good schools some of them said they would like to educate their children to come privately they wanted help with housekeeping and child care they wanted extra sports tuition or academic tuition for their children membership of a gym holidays and possibly a second home trying to think to myself as a child in the 1950s whether if you had randomly taken a selection of people other than the aristocracy whether anybody would have held any of those aspirations remember in the 1950s not many people had aspiration for instance to be homeowners this seems to me to be a lie seems to be holding up a dream in front of people which for many of them will be unattainable and if that's the good life then a lot of people are going to feel very let down what you will note about all those aspirations is that virtually all of them in any primary way has anything to do with anyone else it's all about me and about my future family contrast this with the reading that Suzanne has just read where Jesus opens the scroll of Isaiah

I imagine the people in the synagogue that day looked at each other and said oh here we go again and he read from that scroll these are what you might call the aspirations of the kingdom of God that the poor will have good news preached to them that prisoners will be set free and that people who are blind and indeed have any illness will be healed and those who feel oppressed will be set free can you see the contrast between those two sets of aspirations one entirely focused on me and my people and the other involves everybody else and the outcomes in their lives I remember reading Jonathan Sachs' outstanding book on morality

Jonathan Sachs was the chief rabbi and one of the things he said which made me think when I read it he said this that morality morality can only begin where we see the needs of others around us and not just our own needs not just talking about community there he's talking about the philosophical idea of morality when I saw the topic that I was down to preach about today if I'm being honest my heart skipped a beat I thought to myself so I'm going to stand up and talk about compassion to a bunch of people who probably get it I don't think at the end of this you're going to do what they did to Jesus and became furious and started you know being mean to him

I hope you're not compassion no compassion is an important part of being a disciple of Jesus Christ and occasionally we see acts of compassion going on in the wider world people who selflessly give themselves to care for the sick in war zones etc. etc.

look after their neighbours etc. etc. but we also see the terrible ability of people to be absolutely abysmal to each other I'm in the middle of reading Isabel Hardman's majestic history of the NHS and she reminds us of that time when AIDS first became a disease that people needed to take notice of and she chapters there the appalling behaviour that the general public at large out of fear manifested towards people who had AIDS they demanded for instance that the children of anybody

who had AIDS should be banned from schooling they would throw red paint on cars and write pervert imagining that all

[7 : 20] AIDS was the kind of sole domain of gay people it was not our finest hour and then the people who had been infected with AIDS through contaminated blood products this happened in the 1980s it took till 2019 19 for there to be an inquiry as to why this might be and the only reason there was an inquiry was it was a political compromise because Theresa May needed the votes of the democratic unionists in Northern Ireland and they were very keen on having an inquiry for those who'd been infected with blood products 3,000 people died as a result they were hemophiliacs and received contaminated blood products I want to talk to you about compassion and I wonder if you're the kind of person who thinks that compassion is a kind of synonym for love

I would imagine why don't we do it if you think it is a synonym for love would you put your hand up nobody does come on some of you must I'm sure yes it is I mean broadly speaking it is but the problem is it's where the limitations of language kick in now Michael Bourne who was the Bishop of Chester told of a time when he went to South Korea to preach and to teach and his South Koreans not up to teaching and preaching so he had to work with a simultaneous translator and without thinking he stood up one day and said to the gathered assembly my wife and I are tickled to death to be here the translator looked at him and said something in Korean and the whole of the party assembled took a great gasp of air turned out that what the translator had said is my wife was itching and I scratched her too she nearly died it's when you begin to see that language is limited you remember all that stuff in the book of

Revelation that weird language the vision that John has of the risen Christ and the throne of heaven why is it so weird because it's difficult to find words to describe the infinite and the trouble with compassion the trouble with the word love in English is that we have one word for love the ancient Greeks as many of you know had four words for love there was the word that Jesus used the most agape that is a word for love that is more to do with setting my will to want the best for another person than what I feel in my heart my emotions then there is the word storge storge is a word that means it's kind of family love

I guess then there is philia which means family relationships and then the one you've all been waiting for eros which means sexual love four words which we translate with one word and we wonder why in our culture today there is such a dystopian understanding of what love is but let's focus on the bible word for compassion it's a word that you really don't want to attempt until you've got your teeth in the word is splash nitsamai when I read our text I want you to read exactly the same chapter and verse as it was written in the authorised version of the bible the word pity in the niv is replaced by another phrase in the av it says this the authorised version but whosoever hath this world's good and seeth his brother in need and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him how dwelleth the true love of

God within him I mean this sounds like you know if you're constipated you might not be very loving I don't know if that's true but why is that word used well the word the verb flexenio means to feel in your bowels and there's a reason why it's translated compassion and it's this that Jewish people thought the seat of the emotions was our bowels that's understandable have you ever been noticed and felt you've got a bit of a dicky tummy don't put your hands up so when we're told that Jesus was moved with compassion it means that he was moved deeply in our culture today we probably would say that the word empathy covers the word compassion a bit better being empathetic is very helpful being empathetic incidentally doesn't mean that you construct stuff that's not true in order to try and identify with another person

[13 : 30] I remember meeting Charles Bronson in Milton Kean's prison very difficult for me to feel like somebody has gone and killed a load of people couldn't do that yet he wanted my help I think some people are naturally more empathetic and therefore more compassionate than others for instance what we know is if you're the kind of person who is a mimic like you go and stay in another country and you come back for a few months with the accent you're more likely to be an empathetic person Brené Brown I think points out that often sympathy is a kind of cheap shot and a lot of people who've gone through a rough time particularly bereaved people

I mean some bereaved people have told me that some of their closest friends will cross the street rather than talk to them in case they said something stupid how are we going to embrace compassion in our lives and Brené Brown gave you a kind of definition of empathy it's trying to get inside somebody's situation with them but I want to say that Jesus gives another twist to empathy

his compassion is always connected to action let me say that again Jesus compassion is always connected to action Matthew chapter 14 and verse 14 we're told that Jesus had compassion and he healed a blind man in Mark chapter 4 and verse 41 he had compassion on that man and delivered him from evil spirits you remember by filling the herd of pigs with the evil spirits that had previously been in the man in Mark chapter 6 and verse 34 just before the feeding of the 5,000

Jesus looks out the crowd has compassion on them and he begins to teach them do you get the message Jesus compassion compassion is always backed up by action so let me close today by giving you three things to think about in relation to compassion compassion the first thing is compassion doesn't mean that I never have to speak the truth in love to somebody you don't have to throttle back on somebody and something that you think is badly wrong with their life to be compassionate and God knows you know we have had five children if we had not added a little corrective therapy occasionally out of love not because we hate them then even more chaos would have reigned in our house do you remember once there was a rich young man who came to Jesus and this young man was very wealthy and he said what must I do to inherit eternal life and Jesus says to him go sell all your possessions give to the poor and come and follow me I don't think that was a kind of general generic point about wealth though the Bible is clear in its message that wealth can be a major distraction for us in our discipleship we're told that this young man went away sad not not everybody who met Jesus went away with a healing or without feeling restored or forgiven some people just couldn't cope with the radical nature of the message Jesus told this man there was one thing he lacked I wonder if you think about your life what would you say to Jesus would be the one thing you lack you might like to tell him about that this morning the second thing about compassion is avoids hasty and unfeeling judgment look

I know this is a hazard of getting older one of the hazards is that there's a lot in the world that we don't like and neither should we and though it's important occasionally as part of our compassion to level with people to speak the truth in love getting to hasty and cruel judgments about others is difficult as a French philosopher whose name escapes me one of the things he observes is that if we think about people in general we're kind of turned off we don't you know we think it's not we don't like them but when we think about the people we know or the people we bump into to individuals then we can show excessive care and love toward them but compassion avoids hasty and unfeeling judgment do we ever talk about benefit cheats do we ever talk about people who and I put my hand up here people who drive through our town having removed the baffles from their exhaust system it sounds like concord arriving

[19:49] I can be hasty and judgmental to people who do that it all seems so pointless to me with apologies for those who have taken the baffles out of their exhaust pipes and the final thing is compassion asks us to do something I wonder if this week you could leave here and think about somebody you know who's going for a hard time at the moment and try and think yourself into what it's like what you felt like when you've been depressed or you felt over angry or you felt let down or you felt nobody loves you and try and put yourself in their situation but then do something maybe you could do the bake a cake and take it round to their house maybe you could write an email to them or write a note even better maybe or maybe you could pick up a telephone and make a call remember what it said in the clip compassion is not about the application of sticking plaster treatment no even if the only way you can articulate your compassion is to say

I can't imagine what you must be feeling right now but I want to try and be in that with you to walk with you how are we going to discover the good life well today's theme introduces us to something really important the good life is not just about me me me it's about we we we going to Jonathan Sachs that's the place where morality begins but it's also the place where compassion begins doesn't really work that well if you're not prepared to act on your compassion sflak themia feeling in your guts I don't think we have any idea

I know how many people are here this morning maybe 50 of you but even if only half of you went away and did something you think about how that would improve care quality in our community I wonder do we get compassion do we really want to be people who connect with others or do we just want to be like billiard boards that clash against each other and go off in different directions things Jesus had compassion on people so he healed Jesus had compassion on people so he delivered people from demonic influence Jesus had compassion on people and so he taught them friends we need to get serious about learning our discipleship in order that the light of

Christ might shine in us and slowly but surely millimeter by millimeter our world might begin to change why don't we pray our gracious father as we come to communion we pray that you might show us what the one thing is that we lack in our walk with you whether it's a bad attitude poor behavior addiction to a habit what's the one thing that we would say to Jesus if he were to ask us what is the one thing you lack and father we want to ask that you would send your holy spirit deep into the hidden recesses of our heart that the spirit may shine his light and we might see the truth about ourselves so we pray come holy spirit set our hearts on fire with love for you and for the world which you loved enough to save you would spare us from cheap shot elastoplast attempts to care and stand with those who suffer bring them healing bring them insight maybe even bring them deliverance and we pray these things in Jesus name and the people who agreed said together amen to to give them