**Kindness**

Matthew 9:1-8, 18-2

***A Jewish priest*** was walking along the road, preparing for important business in Jerusalem. He saw a man beaten up on the roadside, clearly an unfortunate who had been laid upon by bandits and left for dead by the road. The priest shook his head at the violence in this area and whispered a brief prayer for the bleeding man as he passed by, unable to stop given his schedule.

***A Levite*** was just a mile behind the priest, also on his way to the temple with some essential items for the upcoming worship celebration. The Levite, too, saw the poor man by the roadside and noted that the man’s wounds looked serious and would need attention soon if he were to survive. But the temple servant had no time to spare and with a shake of his head hurried on to his important duties with the upcoming worship service.

A mile behind the Levite there was ***a Samaritan***. He knew he would be spurned in Jerusalem and certainly wasn’t welcome for their upcoming festival, nor would he have wanted to attend anyway. Jews, in his experience, were unfriendly and judgmental of Samaritans like him, refusing to spend time with them, share meals or even walk together on a road. But the Samaritan saw the man on the roadside - clearly a Jewish man - and it was the Samaritan, of all people, who showed mercy. He tended the man’s most serious wounds right there, and then hefted him onto his donkey and carried him to a nearby inn, where the Samaritan paid to have the beaten man cared for until he had recovered.

A priest, a levite and a Samaritan. It sounds like the opening of a **bad religious joke**.

***A Catholic priest and a Jewish Rabbi ran into each other with their cars***. It was a serious head on collision, but both walked away without a scratch. As it was the first time they were meeting each other both said, “It’s a miracle! The Lord must want us to be friends.” The Rabbi looked in his back seat and said, “Another miracle! This new bottle of Manischewitz wine wasn’t cracked! Let’s drink to our new friendship.” The priest gladly took the bottle and had a long drink. Then he offered it back to the rabbi who said, “Oh no, I think I’ll wait until the police arrive.”

A bad religious joke. I tried to warn you.

But Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan not as a joke but as ***a provocative lesson on MERCY*** or compassion or KINDNESS.

Kindness is a deep **Compassion** for the needs of others that moves you to meet those needs with **Generosity**.

Kindness is not just about feeling sympathy for someone. ***It is letting that compassion move you to action.*** The priest and Levite did not show kindness. They may have felt some sympathy, but whatever feelings they had did not move them to do anything.

Obviously, our ultimate picture of kindness is **Jesus Himself**. He not only had feelings of compassion for us, but those feelings moved him to come live among us and then give up his life for us on the cross. Matthew 9 documents Jesus’ kindness toward nine different people and groups - a kindness that moved him to act on their behalf. And this chapter of love ends with these words:

“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.” Matthew 9:36-38

***What a window into the heart of Jesus!*** He saw the crowds flocking to him like sheep without a shepherd - lost, helpless, wandering, struggling, fearful - and he didn’t resent them for it; he wasn’t frustrated about it. He had COMPASSION for them.

***Then notice what Jesus DID.*** Verse 35 says he was teaching and healing everyone. But the main way Jesus showed KINDNESS to the crowds was by **telling his disciples to PRAY and to GO** into the harvest. WE are the expression of Jesus’ kindness to the nations. As we pray and as we go into the harvest, we extend the mercy and love of Jesus to the people around us.

So let’s look at Matthew 9 to learn from **both sides of Jesus’ kindness** - the feelings of compassion and the actions of generosity. We’ll summarize the nine encounters into ***three groups or types of people***: sinful people, religious people and hurting people.

The first encounter in Matthew 9 was with a paralyzed man who we would probably put in the category of hurting people, but Jesus didn’t.

Jesus’ Kindness for **Sinful** People:

* Feeling Compassion and Acting Generously

“When Jesus saw their faith he said to the paralytic, ‘Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.’” Matthew 9:2

What a kind response! Jesus came “home” to Capernaum, his base of operation, and a group of people were there, having brought to Jesus’ known residence a friend of theirs who was paralyzed. ***No doubt everyone there was surprised*** to hear Jesus say these words to the crippled man. When Jesus said, “Take heart, my son,” surely they all expected his next words to be “rise, pick up your mat and go home.” Jesus had healed similar problems with just a word of command.

But this time Jesus wanted to make a very **important point** - a point we all need to hear today as well: that whatever problems we have, there is ***one problem that is more serious and more difficult*** to treat and that is our SIN. We would all look at someone who couldn’t walk or move and think - that guy’s biggest problem is being paralyzed. But that wasn’t Jesus’ assessment. And the reason Jesus didn’t assess it that way is because Jesus is so perfectly KIND.

Jesus had ***deep compassion for this man***. And because Jesus loved this man so much, he wanted more for the man than just to give him the use of his arms and legs again. Jesus wanted to heal the man’s heart - to fix his deepest problem first.

If we really love people we will want their **overall wellbeing**, ***not just their physical*** health. And Jesus clearly prioritized this throughout his ministry. Yes, he healed a lot of people, but over and over again Jesus made it clear that “the heart of the human problem is the problem of the human heart” (Rico Tice, *Christianity Explored*). ***Jesus came to bring a complete solution***, not just a bandaid, surface, temporary fix.

So as we interact with people and try to exercise kindness, we need to follow Jesus’ example and seek to meet both their physical and spiritual needs.

Jesus’ Kindness for **Sinful** People:

* Compassion for their **Eternal** peril

“‘But that you may know the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins’ - he then said to the paralytic - ‘Rise, pick up your bed and go home.’” Matthew 9:6

 It is no accident that Jesus did this healing in this way. As we’ll see in a minute, he had an audience of religious people and wanted to make a point for them as well - about his authority to forgive sins. But for the paralyzed man and his friends, Jesus communicates very clearly: “I can heal your physical problems, and in this case I will. But your much bigger problem is the sin in your heart - and that is the main thing I came to heal.”

This is ***so relevant as we minister to people!*** Yes, in kindness we must attend to their physical needs, showing compassion, understanding and love and helping as we are able. But let’s not kid ourselves that we are showing kindness if all we do is meet physical needs and we never tell people about Jesus’ offer to forgive their sins and heal their hearts.

If we really have compassion for people, we should consider ***the gravity of the problem of sin***. A physical illness may bother you for 70-80 years. Being controlled and trapped in your sin will plague you for the endless ages of eternity. By comparison, physical healing is very nearly irrelevant. It’s like **doing math using INFINITE**, any other number fades to irrelevance. What is 80 or 100 years of suffering compared with an eternity in which 10,000 years has not even scratched the surface?

We struggle to understand evil and suffering in the world because ***we simply cannot fathom eternity***. To us a week or a month feel like a long time, but when you think about a million years and a billion years - what are a few weeks, a few months?

Look at John 3:36. Many people know John 3:16 “For God so loved the world,” but the verse more people should learn is John 3:36.

Jesus’ Kindness for **Sinful** People:

* Compassion for their **Eternal** peril

“Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.” John 3:36

Did you catch that last phrase? “The wrath of God REMAINS on him.” The person who does not believe in and obey Jesus is ***defined by their sin*** so when they step into the holy presence of God for judgment, they will face condemnation followed by wrath. They will be cut off from LIFE, for they will be severed from the Giver and source of all life. So their eternal experience will be one of inexpressible misery, suffering under the just wrath of God.

The best way I can describe eternal suffering is that ***people will be stuck with THEMSELVES*** forever - consumed by their own selfishness, anger, resentment and regret with nowhere to turn and no one to blame but themselves. Since they lived in sin, Jesus says, they will “die in sin.”

This is why Jesus and the apostles prioritized spiritual over physical healing. Yes, they performed physical healings, but those were always to prove the power of Jesus’ Name - His glory and sufficiency to save.

Jesus’ Kindness for **Sinful** People:

* Generous **Grace**

“As Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came…” Matthew 9:10

Because of His compassion for their true spiritual condition, ***Jesus was generous with His grace for sinful people***. The religious leaders of his day would not spend time with tax collectors and sinners much less eat with them. But Jesus called Matthew to become one of his disciples and then reached out to all of Matthew’s tax collector friends, and the low-lifes with whom they associated. When the Pharisees questioned him for this unusual social practice, Jesus said:

Jesus’ Kindness for **Sinful** People:

* Generous **Grace**

“Those who are well have no need for a physician, but those who are sick.” Matthew 9:12

Jesus came as **the ultimate physician** - to heal both body and soul. And He was generous with His grace for SINNERS - those who knew their need for forgiveness. Tax collectors were notoriously corrupt government employees - skimming off for themselves from the official Roman taxes they collected. Jews who took this job were universally despised for selling out their friends and countrymen to serve the evil Empire. But Jesus’ compassion for their spiritual needs led him to offer forgiveness and grace to all who would come to him in faith.

Now the second type of person: religious people.

Jesus’ Kindness for **Religious** People:

* Compassion for their spiritual **Blindness**

“But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, ‘Why do you think evil in your hearts?’” Matthew 9:4

When Jesus pronounced forgiveness for the paralyzed man, verse three says that ***the scribes present said TO THEMSELVES***, “this man is blaspheming.” Jesus not only read the room and sensed what was going on, he actually knew their thoughts and called them out.

Now here’s the point of **contrasting the different kinds of people**. ***Kindness looks different depending on the kind of person you are dealing with***. Did the house full of tax collectors and sinners have evil thoughts? Of course. Did Jesus call them out? No. Why? Because the tax collector group already KNEW they were sinners. They made no pretense of being holy and righteous but were with Jesus to learn about his kingdom and to experience his forgiveness.

**The scribes** were there to criticize and question Jesus, not to learn from him. They were there to judge the new rabbi and report back at the temple about his blasphemous teachings. But Jesus was generous with the religious people, just in a different way.

Jesus’ Kindness for **Religious** People:

* Generous **Truth**

“‘But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins’ - he then said to the paralyzed man, ‘Rise, pick up your bed and go home.’” Matthew 9:6

With sinful people, Jesus was generous with grace. With religious people, Jesus was generous with truth. He said, “You doubt my authority? Let’s talk about authority.” Then with a word of command he healed the man. And look at the response!

Jesus’ Kindness for **Religious** People:

* Generous **Truth**

“When the crowds saw it they were afraid and they glorified God, who had given such authority to men.” Matthew 9:8

Notice who responded with worship - **the CROWDS**, not the scribes. The crowds gathered around rightly interpreted the healing as a sign of divine authority - God-given power and authorization. The scribes were simply silenced by the miracle, and we aren’t told what they thought or did.

Later in his ministry ***Jesus refused to do a miracle or perform a sign for the religious leaders***. Instead, he confronted their lack of faith and gave them homework saying, “No sign will be given to you except the sign of Jonah.” In effect he told them to go read the book of Jonah and be reminded of the gospel, that God can raise the dead.

When the Pharisees questioned him about his party with tax collectors Jesus did something similar:

Jesus’ Kindness for **Religious** People:

* Generous **Truth**

“Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.’ For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.” Matthew 9:13 (Hos. 6:6)

This time Jesus sent the religious people to the **prophet Hosea**. He said, “***Do your homework***. You think you know the Bible? Actually study it! Look at what the prophet wrote!”

Hosea’s book is not a feel good, heart warming novella. It is a ***scathing confrontation*** of the wicked immorality and unfaithfulness of Israel, like that of a wife who preferred prostitution.

Look at the verse direclty before the one Jesus quoted:

Jesus’ Kindness for **Religious** People:

* Generous **Truth**

“Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets; I have slain them by the words of my mouth.” Hosea 6:5

God’s response to the rebellion and idolatry of His people was to warn and warn and confront and ***exhort them through the prophets*** and then, eventually, to send them into exile for a 70 year timeout. He was generous with TRUTH because He was compassionate for their spiritual blindness. And the point of Hosea was - “stop your religious exercises, like offering animal sacrifices - and actually love me, said the Lord.”

Let’s be sure to catch the application here. ***Kindness is not always the same as NICENESS.*** We often think that the best, most virtuous, most Christian approach to people is NICENESS - polite civility. And, for sure, that’s better than being an obnoxious, judgmental jerk. But let’s really reflect here. Was Jesus “nice” to everyone? Does that test work with WWJD? What DID Jesus do?

No question, for sinners who repented, Jesus was tender and merciful. We’ll see in a minute that for the hurting and broken Jesus was patient and gentle and nice to the extreme. But when it came to religious people Jesus laid aside that soft, gentle approach and was kind in a totally different way. ***“Woe to you, teachers of the law, you HYPOCRITES! Woe to you Pharisees, you whitewashed tombs! You brood of vipers!”***

Now, let’s be clear - ***Jesus had the advantage of PERFECT sensitivity to the human heart*** and often demonstrated supernatural perception of people’s thoughts, as it said in verse 4 - he knew their thoughts. We would be unwise to try to imitate Jesus totally in this area. But there is a time and a place for being more generous with TRUTH as we interact with people who are straying from the authority of the Bible and the centrality of the gospel.

* Let’s say your child or grandchild is being ***drawn into a cult*** - being wooed by the JW or Mormons. It’s not a time to be nice and courteous and just “see how it plays out.” You need to step in and cut off those conversations and get your loved one back on solid footing with Biblical Christianity.
* Or say someone in your ***Community Group*** is becoming critical and judgmental of others in the group. They are quick to talk and slow to listen, often correcting people for not understanding the Bible exactly right. Sometimes as a group leader you just need to be nice and keep the peace but other times you need to pull that troublemaker aside and help them listen more and talk less.
* Or say ***a close friend is drifting from the Lord*** - inconsistent with coming to church, often skipping small group or D-Group, not staying in the Word privately either. Again, we tend to default to “niceness” to protect the relationship but there is a time to be a little less nice and a little more BOLD. In my experience when someone stops showing up for things it is almost always a sign of something going on in their lives. Marriage trouble. Secret sin. Financial stress. Sometimes all of the above and more.

Jesus shows us what true kindness looks like - ***it means stepping TOWARD people***, not away from them, and helping them see their need and the gospel solution to it. For sinful people, they usually know the problem of sin but need a generous dose of grace. For religious people, they usually DON’T know their problem of self-righteousness - they need help to perceive it and that can come in a generous dose of truth. One more group Jesus showed kindess to: the hurting.

Jesus’ Kindness for **Hurting** People:

* Compassion for their **Holistic** Suffering

“A woman who had suffered from a discharge of blood for twelve years came up behind him and touched the fringe of his garment.” Matthew 9:20

Imagine what life was like for this poor woman. **Feminine hygiene** products back then were called cloth, rags. If you had a heavy cycle, you spent several days at home every month. Remember how Rachel concealed the fact that she had stolen an idol? She claimed it was her time of the month and the men very quickly turned around and searched elsewhere. To this day it’s a magic password that gets young women out of PE, out of youth group games they don’t want to play, out of bad work assignments. Of course, I say that as a dad of four boys so I’m just guessing and really don’t want to think about it any more.

Someone who had a ***continuous discharge of blood,*** in a Jewish area, would have been an outcast considered cursed by God and unclean. No one would have associated with her. She was not welcome in the synagogue or in any respectable Jewish home. She would defile any place she went and any person she touched. If you accidentally brushed her hand, YOU would be considered unclean and have to stay away from others for a few days.

Now think of this - ***she almost certainly avoided touching Jesus’ skin as a sign of respect for him*** - thinking to herself, “If I just touch the hem of his garment, I will be healed.” What a remarkable act of faith! Surely, she had heard of people Jesus had healed by TOUCHING them with his hands. But she didn’t dare ask him to touch her and she wouldn’t even touch him herself. But she believed in Him so much that just getting near him, just brushing his cloak, she felt, would cure her. ***AND IT DID.***

**What a beautiful moment**, documented in detail in Matthew, Mark and Luke. And all three record the fact that Jesus was on his way somewhere else. He had an urgent appointment with an important man - a ruler according to Matthew; a synagogue ruler named Jairus according to Mark and Luke. Jairus’ daughter had just died. The synagogue ruler had enough faith to come to Jesus and he believed that if Jesus came soon enough, his daughter might come back to life. Did he only have faith for a little CPR rescucitation? Did he really believe Jesus could raise the dead after a couple of hours had gone by? No doubt he was in a hurry either way.

But Jesus, in His wonderful kindness, ***stopped the whole hustling procession*** to draw attention to this woman. He didn’t have to stop. She was healed as soon as she touched his cloak. He could have just let her go away anonymously. But Jesus loved her too much for that. He wasn’t just concerned about her PHYSICAL wellbeing, He was concerned for her TOTAL, holistic wellbeing.

By publicly drawing attention to the healing **Jesus restored her SOCIALLY**. No longer an outcast, unclean and defiled, now she was clean, healthy and welcome in Jewish society! But even more than that Jesus was concerned for her SPIRITUAL wellbeing and wanted her to be clear that it wasn’t Jesus’ CLOAK that had healed her - it was Jesus himself. Listen to the compassion in Jesus’ voice:

Jesus’ Kindness for **Hurting** People:

* Generous **Love**

“Take heart, daughter; your faith has made you well.” Matthew 9:23

Oh, to be called ***DAUGHTER*** by the King, the Messiah. That’s how Jesus addressed the paralyzed man earlier in the chapter, “Take heart my son, your sins are forgiven.”

Oh, brother, sister - hear the Lord speak to your heart today: ***“Take heart my son, my daughter. Take heart.”*** Don’t be discouraged. Don’t let your heart be troubled.

**Jesus has compassion for your WHOLE life** - every side of your problems. He is concerned about your physical health, your emotional wellbeing, your spiritual grounding, your relational connectedness, your vocational contribution - every part of you. And Jesus is so generous with His love.

Jesus’ Kindness for **Hurting** People:

* Generous **Love**

“Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction.” Matthew 9:35

Oh, the generous kindness of the Lord Jesus! ***ALL the cities, all the villages, every disease, every affliction***. Jesus did not distinguish between those committed to him and those not committed. Many people were healed physically and never came back to Jesus. He would have restored every part of their lives but they went away with one miracle instead of sticking around for the complete treatment.

Jesus’ Kindness for **Hurting** People:

* Generous **Love**

“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” Matthew 9:36

Jesus is the **Good Shepherd**. He knows that we are helpless sheep, vulnerable and in need of protection and guidance. When he looks out at the people of Tampa Bay this is His posture, His kind, loving heart for them - he has compassion for them. He sees that they are harassed by a relentless enemy who is set to steal, kill and destroy them. He knows that they are helpless to defend themselves, unable to escape - desperately in need of a shepherd. And don’t miss Jesus’ solution to this problem.

Jesus’ Kindness for **Hurting** People:

* Generous **Love**

“Then he said to his disciples, ‘The harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few; therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.’” Matthew 9:37-38

Did you catch that? ***PRAY. Ask for more workers.*** And what should we expect when we pray for workers? That Jesus will send US out into that harvest. We are the shepherds Jesus is deploying to find His lost sheep and bring them in.

At the annual pastor prayer summit two weeks ago, I met a brother named **Abraham**. He was raised up north but moved to Florida as a prodigal, running away from God, his parents and family. He believed he was gay and dove headlong into the lifestyle in downtown Ybor City. He was sinking in despair and finally hit rock bottom when he thought he had HIV. He believed he was going to die and started making plans to end his own life.

But before going through with it, he felt he should go to church one time ***just to confirm that God hated him***. He fully expected to walk into church and get kicked out, hearing a clear message of hate. He found a church online and walked in for the worship service. It was a large church in a big stadium. And in the middle of the message the speaker stopped and walked right up to him. Imagine. Thousands of people in the room, the preacher was led by the Spirit directly to Abraham. And he said to him, “I see you. I know you’re here and I’m SO glad you came. God doesn’t hate you. He loves you. He loves you more than you’ll ever know.”

Abraham now serves on staff at a church in Ybor City, ***reaching out to people in that alternate lifestyle*** and helping his church learn how to be welcoming instead of judgmental. At the prayer summit, he challenged all of us pastors who were praying specifically for Ybor City - ***“Don’t just pray. Don’t just talk***. You have to come. You have to get out there on the streets and meet people. You have to SHOW them that God loves them. You have to be there because they won’t come to church.”

He said that the harvest is plentiful, but we have to become workers out in the harvest - not just hanging out in the barn.

Now, let’s apply the gospel.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ↑ | Jesus has deep compassion for the needs of people and acts **Generously** to meet those needs |
| ↓ | We are callous and uncaring for others, attending mainly to our own needs and desires |
| ❤ | Jesus generously works to **Restore** every part of our lives |
| → | And he sends us out as His under-**Shepherds** to spread His love and truth |

Jesus shows us what **perfect kindness** looks like - customized generosity for the real needs of people. For sinners who repent, he is generous with grace. For righteous people who think they don’t need to repent, he is generous with truth and confronts them sharply to expose their wrong thinking. For those who are hurting and broken, Jesus is generous with love, addressing every part of their pain to bring full restoration.

By contrast, ***we are selfish and uncaring***. We aren’t aware of the desperate need of others and don’t make a lot of effort - most of the time - to find out how people are actually doing. We are plenty aware of our own needs and desires and generally are occupied running around to do life as we always do - even if that means walking by some hurting people by the roadside.

But right there when we are not caring for others and are stuck in our selfishness, Jesus meets us in love and stretches out his hand **to heal us and restore us**. He offers us ***holistic transformation*** - every part of us - if we will surrender every part to Him. He always starts with the heart - forgiving sin. That is the deepest problem and the one from which all other problems stem. But Jesus never stops there. He gets to work to heal our relationships, to heal our emotions and thoughts, to strengthen us physically and to guide us vocationally. Jesus does a TOTAL home makeover, a complete restoration, if we let Him.

And as those who have been remade and are being shaped more and more into His kind, loving image, ***Jesus sends us out into the harvest as His undershepherds***, offering care as His hands, His feet, His voice, His love made tangible for the people around us.

Let’s not walk by on the other side of the street any longer. Let’s ask the Lord of the harvest to send us out into His harvest and then let’s move forward as the answer to our own prayer!

Let’s pray.