

*“When He saw the crowds, He had compassion for them.”* How would we complete that sentence? When you, or when I see the crowds... *“We get away from them as quickly as possible?”* *“We become concerned, not knowing what the crowds will do?”* We certainly would not do as Jesus does and have compassion for them. These days crowds are not a good thing. They can make you sick. Or, if they become agitated, they can destroy your property. You never know what kind of people make up crowds these days. Best to avoid crowds altogether.

Not Jesus. Seeing the crowds, He has compassion for them. This is a loaded word...compassion. Today it is defined as kindness, caring, being thoughtful and decent. What the word *compassion* means here in the Greek is connected to Jesus' belly. His belly literally aches with intense pain because He is so moved for the people.

But there surely are petty criminals in these crowds. And lazy people who are poor by their own fault. There are men in there who have cheated on their wives, and the women with whom they have cheated. There are proud braggarts, and there could even be some cutthroats. These crowds are not made up of the best society has to offer. So, Jesus has compassion for such as these? Yes.

And look what He does. He goes *“throughout all the cities and villages,”* it says, *“healing every disease and every affliction.”* We may have been raised with the understanding that Jesus did miracles every now and then; that He healed a few sick people here and there. But the more we study the Gospels, the more we understand what He really did. Jesus, at certain times in His ministry, and our text is one of them, healed hundreds, even many hundreds of people every day. He was a walking clinic with a one hundred percent success rate. If you were sick, would you come to Him? Of course you would. And you would bring everyone who was sick in your family to Him as well.

So not only are the crowds made up of many of the derelicts of society, there are scads of people in these crowds who are sneezing, and coughing, who are feverish, and nauseated. You name it, they have it. They are not sheltering at home. Oh no. They are coming to Jesus.

But something else makes up these crowds. Not some, but all of them are sinners in need of the Gospel of forgiveness. And look what Jesus does. He is *“teaching in their synagogues,”* it says, *“and proclaiming the Gospel of the kingdom.”* He is dealing not just with sickness, but with sin.

What would Jesus do with the crowd gathered here this morning? We are a crowd of people. Not a large one, but a crowd nonetheless. And wherever there are crowds, there are people who are needy. That's why crowds form. They need something.

What do we need? We did not gather here today to be healed of a sickness. We are not gathered here to protest. We're not here to socialize. And we are not here because God needs something. We are the ones who are needy, not Him. We are here because we are sinners. And sinners need Jesus.

So, what kind of crowd are we? Are we the kind for whom Jesus has compassion? Do you and I make His belly ache? Maybe we should wear t-shirts that say: My God's guts hurt because of me! It would be true. Jesus does have compassion for us. His belly aches with pain because of our needs. And this compassion drives Him to give us exactly what we need.

Jesus is here in this "synagogue" today proclaiming to you the Gospel of the kingdom. This is our greatest need. Sickness, money problems, concerns we have about what is happening in our country, and what is happening with the health of our society – all of these are temporary needs. And even these Jesus takes care of. But our sinfulness... that can make us, as it says of the crowds in our text, "*harassed and helpless*," for it can separate sheep from the Shepherd.

Jesus simply won't allow that. His gut aches too much for you. He will not stand idly by and do nothing. He proclaims into your ears, and places into your mouth, the Gospel of the kingdom. He gives you real forgiveness for your real sins.

Yeah but... it's not as if we are all that needy. I mean, we are not the derelicts of society. We are not cheaters, and cutthroats, and such. And yet our Romans text says that Christ died, not for the best society has to offer, but "*for the ungodly*." It says that "*while we were still sinners, Christ died for us*," and that "*we were enemies (of God)*."

We think of the ungodly as the mugger, the violent rioter, the one in prison, the addict, the one who is unfaithful in marriage, and the like. Yet these are the very people for whom Christ died; for whom He has compassion.

You and I do not need to go out and become muggers and cheaters in order to have a Savior who died for us. We are all cut from the same cloth. The sin that lives in the hearts of all people is the same, even though we may not all act on that sin in the same way.

Friend, your life matters to Jesus. And so He does not overlook your sin, He forgives it. And not because you are godly or ungodly. He died on the cross for the whole world. Every sin He bore. Every sinner is declared forgiven. And this includes you.

And this includes all the crowds of people out there. We pick and choose which crowds we want to join. But keep in mind that we are all part of this crowded earth. Jesus sees this crowd in our text as a harvest field. Now there are places in every field where a combine cannot go. These places must be harvested by individuals by hand. All of us know people in these places. The combine keeps missing them. But can you reach them?

It doesn't matter who they are, or what sins lurk in their past. "*Christ died for the ungodly*." The Lord's belly aches for them, too. Their lives matter, too. You have what they need. You have Jesus because He has you. You are not sheep without the Shepherd. As you "*pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest*" for these people, keep in mind that we are all laborers because we can bring Jesus to others, even to the ungodly. Amen.