

It Is Written

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INDIFFERENT CHRISTIANS?

By Steven Harper

Let's try to re-imagine some Bible scenes, for today only. Let's begin with the text of Luke 7:11-17. In the Bible story, Jesus entered the city of Nain and, by chance, met a large crowd that was headed out to bury the only son of a widow. When Jesus saw her, "He had compassion on her and said to her, 'Do not weep'" (v. 13), and then went to the open coffin of the young man and touched it. He then said, "Young man, I say to you, arise" (v. 14), and the young man rose from the dead and Jesus presented the young man to his mother. It is not surprising that we then read, "Then fear came upon all, and they glorified God...And this report about Him went throughout all Judea and all the surrounding region" (vv. 16, 17).

Imagine this same scenario, but without one component: The compassion of Jesus.

If He were more like us, instead of compassion, there would be irritation at the crowd impeding our travels into the city; instead of compassion, He and the crowd following Him would be demanding they move aside because of who Jesus was, asking them why they couldn't have done this on a different day; instead of compassion, there would be a widow now left to fend for herself in a world where widows became beggars — left without any means of support and possibly without a home; instead of a great miracle, the widow and the crowd following her would continue to mourn; instead of God being glorified, there would have been many who wondered why God was allowing this woman to suffer yet another loss.

The difference in the two scenarios? Compassion. Empathy. Mercy.

Consider another scenario — the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37). In the Bible story, "a man went down from Jerusalem towards Jericho and fell among thieves." While he had been left for dead by the thieves, a priest came by, saw the man, but passed by on the other side. A Levite also came upon the man, saw him, but also passed by on the other side. A Samaritan came upon the man, saw his condition, and "had compassion. So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him." When Jesus concluded the story, He asked the man who had asked who his neighbor was, "So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" The man correctly replied, "He who showed mercy on him." The difference between the Samaritan and the priest and Levite was compassion. The difference was mercy. Though the man who had initially asked Jesus the question was seeking to justify himself, and though he couldn't even bring himself to say "the Samaritan" in answer to the question of Jesus, at least he did see and understand that the demonstration of love to our neighbor must include acts of mercy and compassion. Acts, not merely words.

I am afraid many Christians in this country are so driven by politics and politicians that our responses to genuine needs and scenarios worthy of our compassion are often instead met with harsh, cold-hearted indifference or even disdain and insults. Others who are not so influenced by politics look just as indifferently at certain needs simply because, as they defensively reply, "They got themselves into trouble, they can get themselves out of it." Others still have such a self-centered view of the world, they simply have no interest in situations and circumstances they have not personally experienced.

Racism? If they haven't experienced it [ignoring the fact they are not a minority], it must be made

up or exaggerated. Bullying? If they never had someone bully them, they shrug and admonish the one complaining to just “grow up” or “toughen up.” Mental health issues and/or depression? It’s just the latest buzzword or fad, not really ‘a thing.’ Sexual harassment? Since they wouldn’t imagine doing that, they also cannot seem to see that others — far less godly-minded — will and do harass others regularly. Citizens of foreign countries suffering mightily because of war and those greedy for more power? It’s not happening here, so it’s not my problem.

Brethren, surely we can do better than this! We need to turn off our TVs and get off the Internet and all the political influence it wields, and pick up our Bibles and do some much-needed study! We need to set aside our personal politics and American ideals and start searching for how Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior, would have us respond.

Under the Old Law, God’s own people drifted away from God and His ways, and late in the kingdom’s history [before captivity], He spoke to them through Micah and noted not just their habit of following idols (Mic. 1:3-7), but also their oppression of the poor and less powerful (2:1-2, 8-9). When he admonished them to repent, it was not merely a matter of telling them, “Be faithful to the Law of Moses,” but asked, “He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Mic. 6:8).

During the first century, when Jesus walked this earth and went about teaching and demonstrating His power through signs, wonders, and miracles, He once confronted the religious leaders and their hypocrisy, saying, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone” (Matt. 23:23).

If you noticed, the factor common to both situations was not an admonishment to keep the law strictly [surely, the scribes and Pharisees thought they were doing that already], but to show mercy. Somehow, we read those words and sometimes then act as if they are not there when we interact with others. Sometimes, it seems that mercy is low on the list of characteristics in Christians that should be most evident. Quite often, we end up looking more like the Pharisees than we would want to admit, focusing on law-keeping and dismissing the importance of characteristics like mercy, compassion, and empathy.

In Luke’s account of the Sermon on the Mount, after admonishing His audience to not merely love those who love them, He then said, “But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful” (Luke 6:32-36). Add to this the reminder from James “that the Lord is very compassionate and merciful” (Jas. 5:11), and we understand we have a high standard we need to emulate! At the very least, we should be merciful because God was merciful to us!

Let us not be indifferent Christians; indeed, such should not even exist! As a final point, let us hear John when he writes of the sacrifice Jesus made for us because of His love, and the resulting behavior of disciples who know and value that sacrifice of love. We will be disciples who look for opportunities to demonstrate our love, rather than merely mouthing words of love (1st John 3:16-18), which brings us back to what true compassion is: A feeling of pity or sympathy for another in need, but with action to alleviate or fulfill that need.

Be the light (Matt. 5:16).