

The God of Compassion

INTRODUCTION:

- I. The history of the Old Testament nation of Israel is filled with periods of faithfulness and obedience followed by periods of disobedience.
 - A. But in the end, the nation of Israel was defeated because of their unfaithfulness toward God and their complete indifference toward God's Law.
 1. It is difficult to pinpoint a specific instance that started their gradual downfall.
 2. Maybe it began when a few Israelites heard about the Canaanite gods and became intrigued with this false, pagan worship.
 - a. At first they didn't actually worship these false gods – they were only curious.
 - b. But over time, that curiosity intensified in some, and they decided to give it a try.
 - c. Before they realized it, one compromise led to another, which led to another, and another.
 - d. And in the end, their curiosity led to a wholesale apostasy into idolatry, and to forsake the One True God of heaven and earth.

2. And yet, through all their unfaithfulness; through all their rebellion and disobedience; God's love for Israel never diminished.
- B. The same is true for us today.
1. Although we may forsake God, He never forsakes us.
 2. Although we may be unfaithful to Him, He is always faithful to us.
 3. Although our love for Him may diminish, His love for us never dies.
- C. And so, to help us better understand and appreciate God's love and compassion, let's take a trip back in time.
2. Let's begin by looking back in time to the tragic history of the children of Israel

BODY:

- I. As I said earlier, the Israelites constantly vacillated between periods of faithfulness followed by times of disobedience and rebellion.
 - A. In 722 BC, the powerful Assyrian army swept through the northern kingdom of Israel, crushing Israel's weak defenses, killing all those who resisted, and taking captive the rest of the Jews of that region.
 1. God told Hosea, a prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel, why all this happened: **Hosea 8:4** – *"They set up kings, but not by Me; they made princes, but I did not acknowledge them. From their*

silver and gold they made idols for themselves — that they might be cut off."

2. God's people were simply swept away. But there was a reason.
Hosea 8:7 – God said it was because, "*They sow the wind, and reap the whirlwind.*"
- B. Then in 536 BC, the Babylonian armies, that had devastated the Assyrians, now turned their attention to the southern kingdom of Judah, and the city of Jerusalem, overwhelming the city's defenses, slaying hundreds of thousands, and taking captive the surviving Jews in Judah, and marching them off to Babylon.
1. In his journal, titled *The Lamentations of Jeremiah*, the prophet Jeremiah recorded what he saw and felt after the fall of Judah and Jerusalem.
 2. Using a figure of speech known as personification, Jeremiah speaks as if his words were the voice of Jerusalem crying out in despair.
 - a. **Lamentations 3:1-3** – *I am the man who has seen affliction by the rod of His wrath. 2 He has led me and made me walk in darkness and not in light. 3 Surely He has turned His hand against me time and time again throughout the day.*

2. Israel had deliberately, consciously, and with some sense of calculation, walked away from God. And now they were feeling the full impact of their decisions.
3. Jeremiah continues to express the utter sense of hopelessness among the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem.
 - a. **Lamentations 3:8-11** – *Even when I cry and shout, He shuts out my prayer. 9 He has blocked my ways with hewn stone; He has made my paths crooked. 10 He has been to me a bear lying in wait, like a lion in ambush. 11 He has turned aside my ways and torn me in pieces; He has made me desolate.*
4. Just look at the words Jeremiah uses to express the utter despair and humiliation the people of Judah were experiencing at the hand of God.
 - a. **Lamentations 3:4** – *He has aged my flesh and my skin, and broken my bones.*
 - b. **Lamentations 3:5** – *He has besieged me and surrounded me with bitterness and woe.*
 - c. **Lamentations 3:9** – *He has blocked my ways with hewn stone.*
 - d. **Lamentations 3:15** – *He has filled me with bitterness. . .*

5. The people of Judah knew this suffering had come upon them by the hand of God; and they knew they deserved it. But even during these days of darkness, the people never lost complete hope in the loving compassion of Almighty God.

a. **Lamentations 3:20-24** – *My soul still remembers and sinks within me. 21 This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope. 22 Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. 23 They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness. 24 "The Lord is my portion," says my soul, "Therefore I hope in Him!"*

II. What does all this mean? How can we even begin to grasp the compassion of God – especially when He sometimes disciplines us in terrible and painful ways?

A. The word *compassion* is defined as, "sympathetic love," "empathy," or "deep concern and feelings of loving-kindness toward those who are helpless."

1. In fact, the first time this word is used in the Old Testament is in the story of the infant Moses.

- a. Pharaoh had issued an edict that all Hebrew male babies were to be thrown into the Nile River, in an effort to control their growing population.
 - b. And so, in a great act of faith and trust in God, the parents of Moses placed the infant in a crudely made basket, and placed it in the waters of the Nile.
 - c. **Exodus 2:5-6** – *Then the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river. And her maidens walked along the riverside; and when she saw the ark among the reeds, she sent her maid to get it. 6 And when she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby wept. So she had compassion on him, and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children."*
2. The word compassion is also linked with other similar attributes of God.
- a. **Psalms 86:15-16** – *But You, O Lord, are a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in mercy and truth. 16 Oh, turn to me, and have mercy on me!*
 - b. *Compassion, grace, longsuffering, mercy* – these are all words that essentially describe God's "sympathetic love," "empathy," and "deep concern and feelings of loving-kindness toward those [of us] who are helpless."

3. We also read about the great compassion of Jesus.
 - a. **Matthew 9:35-36** – *Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. 36 But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.*
- B. But perhaps the greatest example of the compassion of God was illustrated by Jesus in one of His most beloved parables – the Parable of the Prodigal Son.
 1. In the 15th chapter of Luke, we read where the sinners and tax collectors were literally drawn to gracious and compassionate Jesus.
 2. But the scribes and Pharisees could only see the Savior being surrounded by sinners, whom He not only received, but with whom He even ate.
 3. Therefore, to teach the greatest lesson these scribes and Pharisees would ever hear about the compassion of God toward sinners, Jesus taught three parables: the Parable of the Lost Sheep, the Parable of the Lost Coin; and what many call the Parable of the Lost Son.

- C. In Luke 15:11, Jesus begins the parable by introducing us to a man who had two sons.
1. The younger of the two sons was clearly self-centered, selfish, head-strong, and outright disrespectful and rebellions.
 - a. He even demanded his inheritance before his father died.
 - b. And so, shortly after the father gave this insolent son his portion of the inheritance, the young man left home to get as far away from his father as he could – to begin living his own life, making his own rules, spending time with his own friends.
 2. After some period of time, when the young man had spent his entire inheritance in "prodigal [wasteful] living," there was a severe famine that struck the land, and this young man suddenly found himself in the pit of poverty.
 - a. Not only could this young man not find a job, no one would give him anything – after all, in a famine, there's not enough to go around.
 - b. From the text it seems as if this young man actually volunteered for a job of feeding a man's pigs, hoping he would get something in return.

- c. But he received nothing. And he became so desperate that he was even tempted to eat the refuse he was feeding to the pigs.
3. This is when the young man finally came to his senses, and began to remember the warmth and love of the family he had left behind – just as the people of Judah and Jerusalem remembered the loving-kindness of God in the midst of their captivity.
4. But, more than simply remember the past, the young man realized he needed to do something about his situation. He needed to humble himself, go back home, and in deep contrition of heart confess to his father just how wicked and rebellious he had been.
5. This is where we want to pick up the story.
 - a. **Luke 15:20-24** – *"And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, his father saw him and had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him. 21 And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son.'*

22 "But the father said to his servants, 'Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. 23 And bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us

eat and be merry; 24 for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' And they began to be merry."

6. Did you catch that? As soon as the father saw his son, he *"had compassion, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him."*
7. Not only that, but the son felt so humiliated by his wicked and rebellious past, that he didn't feel worthy of even being considered as his father's son! *"I am no longer worthy to be called your son!"*
8. But the father would have none of that.
 - a. He immediately called for the best robe to be put on his son, and a ring on his hand (probably a ring bearing the family's crest), and shoes on his son's feet (because only slaves went barefoot).
 - b. He called for the fatted calf, reserved for guests of honor, and ordered that it be slain and prepared for a meal.
 - c. But most importantly, the father proclaimed, *"for this my son was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found."*
9. What compassion! What sympathetic love! What feelings of empathy! What deep concern and loving-kindness toward one who is utterly helpless!

D. The scribes and the Pharisees listening to Jesus suddenly realized He had just painted a portrait of the lost sinner finding compassion from the heart of the Living God.

1. The message of Jesus was loud and clear.

a. It doesn't matter how far we have wandered away from God; it doesn't matter how wicked and rebellious we have been; it doesn't matter how deep into sin we have sunk.

b. What matters is that we have a God of compassion; a God of sympathetic love; a God who extends loving-kindness to every wicked, rebellious, prodigal son, who comes back home and says, *"Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son."* **(Luke 15:21)**

III. But there is more about the compassion of God we need to understand, and must never forget. And to understand these important truths, we need to go back to Jeremiah's Lamentations.

A. I think we often fall into the mindset of the prodigal son – we look at ourselves, remembering our past, and the sins we continue to commit – and we think we are not worthy of forgiveness.

1. Like the people of Judah and Jerusalem in Jeremiah's day, they could only see their sin: **Lamentations 3:20** – *My soul still remembers and sinks within me.*
 2. Have you ever felt that way?
 - a. Especially when you remember the times you sinned and rebelled against the Lord. . .
 - b. When you took His blessings for granted. . .
 - c. When you neglected to give Him the glory and praise He deserves and demands.
 3. Didn't your soul sink within you?
 - a. Didn't it bring a feeling of deep remorse?
 4. I certainly hope so, because that's the first step toward real, genuine repentance – it's when we finally "come to ourselves" just like the prodigal son.
 5. Therefore, Jeremiah says: **Lamentations 3:20-21** – *My soul still remembers and sinks within me. 21 This I recall to my mind, therefore I have hope.*
- B. But look at what else Jeremiah tells us about the loving-kindness and compassion of God.

1. **Lamentations 3:22-23** – *Through the Lord's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. 23 They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness.*
 2. Did you get that?
 - a. It's not because of our goodness, or because of our faithfulness, or because of our obedience that we are saved from God's wrath when we sin.
 3. The reason we are not consumed by God's wrath is because of *"the Lord's mercies"* and *"His compassions fail not!"*
 - a. The Lord's mercies and compassions are limitless! They never end!
 - b. *"They are new every morning!"* It doesn't matter what happened yesterday, the mercy and compassion of God is renewed every single day.
- C. We may be feeling a distance between God and ourselves because of sin – and we may even be feeling the hand of God as He disciplines us as a stubborn and rebellious child.
1. There is a reason why God inflicts pain and suffering on us at times. Sometimes it's because we clearly deserve it.
 - a. **Hebrews 12:5-6** – *"My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; 6*

for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives."

- b. God disciplines His children because He loves us – not because He takes delight in seeing us suffer – but because He wants to see us change.
2. Jeremiah needed to remind the people of Judah and Jerusalem of this.
 - a. Therefore, Jeremiah said: **Lamentations 3:31-32** – *For the Lord will not cast off forever. 32 Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. 33 For He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.*

CONCLUSION:

- I. Where would we be without the mercy, loving-kindness and compassion of God?
 - A. The answer is simple. We would be eternally lost in sin – eternally separated from our God, and without any hope whatsoever.
 1. We would be like sheep without a shepherd – left to wander aimlessly through life, fending for ourselves, and falling victim to every predator that came our way.

2. That's how Jesus saw the world. Remember: **Matthew 9:36** – *But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.*
- II. But there is hope for lost, weary, wandering sheep like us.
- A. We have a shepherd – Jesus Christ, the Son of the Living God.
 1. **John 10:11** – *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep."*
 2. **John 10:14-15** – *"I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own. 15 As the Father knows Me, even so I know the Father; and I lay down My life for the sheep."*
 3. **John 10:17-18** – *"Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. 18 No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father."*
 - B. We have a shepherd who loved us enough to lay down His life for us.
 1. He loved us enough to voluntarily lay down His life – meaning no one forced Him to die for us.

2. And, He loved us enough to voluntarily lay down His life for us while we were still in our sin.
 - a. **Romans 5:6-8** – *For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*
- C. Why would Jesus do that? Why would He die for sinners like us?
1. We hear stories where soldiers sacrificed their lives for their brothers in arms; or where people die attempting to shield others from bullets fired from a madman's gun. Those are sacrifices of great courage and heroism – sacrificial acts of unimaginable love.
 2. But when was the last time you heard of someone giving their life for their enemy – an enemy who hated and despised them?
 - a. That's what Jesus did: **Romans 5:10** – *For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.*

3. Jesus not only died to save His enemies (that's sinful "us"); Jesus died to save His enemies because there was no other way we could be saved from our sins.
4. We were saved by His perfect and sinless life – the only perfect and sinless sacrifice God would accept for our sins – and therefore, you and I as sin-filled enemies of Christ were *"reconciled to God through the death of His Son."*
5. The breach between us and our sovereign, powerful, and holy God – a breach caused by our sin – could now be made whole again *"through the death of His Son."*
6. No one could do that for us except Jesus Christ – the lamb of God that takes away the sins of the world.

III. But, in return, the Lord requires something of us.

A. What He requires of us depends on where we are in relationship to Him.

1. If we have never been baptized into Christ, then we need to do what Peter told the people at Pentecost:
 - a. **Acts 2:38** – *"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit."*

2. If we have been baptized into Christ but, like the children of Israel, have wandered back into sin, then we need to do what Jeremiah told the people of his day:
 - a. **Lamentations 3:40** – *"Let us search out and examine our ways, and turn back to the Lord."*
3. If you need to do either of these things, then know that a loving Savior and a compassionate God are waiting for your decision.