

A Beautiful Heart

Have you ever wondered what Jesus thinks when he looks at you? Well, I've worried about this for myself, and wondered if he judges me to be bad. Still, if we look at our reading from Matthew 10, we can see how Jesus sees people.

Matthew 10, verse 36 says:

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.

This is what Jesus sees when he looks at us. When he peers into our souls, he sees our hurt and pain. He sees our helplessness and hopelessness. He sees our troubles and struggles, and then he (Jesus) has compassion on us.

So, Jesus does not see us as other people do, with a critical and judgmental eye. Nor does he see other people as we do, with a critical and judgmental eye. Instead, Jesus sees all of us as we are, harassed, helpless, in need of a shepherd to lead us, and he has compassion for us. He even loves us.

We, on the other hand, have great difficulty seeing beyond the surface. We see what color skin people have, and we judge. We see what denomination or religion people are, and we judge. We see what country people are from, and we judge. How is it that we are so judgmental about each other, when Jesus looks on us with such compassion?

Well, suffice it to say, Jesus has a beautiful heart. And so ...

- Jesus sees a single mom at her wit's end, feeling guilty after responding to her child with anger, and has compassion.
- Jesus sees a middle-aged man suddenly in a midlife crisis, struggling to find meaning, and has compassion.
- Jesus sees an 18-year-old teenager addicted both to alcohol and heroin and has compassion.
- Jesus sees someone coping with the death of a spouse, sibling, child, or friend, and has compassion.
- Jesus sees a husband, wife, and family breaking apart and heading for divorce, and has compassion.
- Jesus sees a sad person, depressed, tossed to and fro by the events of his or her life, and has compassion.
- Jesus sees all who are sick with chronic or serious illnesses, worried about pain and death, and has compassion.

In other words, Jesus with his beautiful heart sees you, my friends in Christ, and he sees other people, along with whatever it is that is harassing us, whatever it is that is making us feel helpless, and he has compassion on us.

Long ago, when I was in college, I befriended some Syrian students who were attending the University of Minnesota. They were in my dormitory, Centennial Hall, and I was their Resident Assistant. Sadly, they were being harassed, because their skin color and appearance, made them look like Iranians. This was just after the American hostage crisis in Iran.

Well, American students, both white and African American, would say nasty things to them, leave them terrible notes, and generally speaking, try to intimidate them. It was really awful. Talk about judgmental. Talk about no compassion. Talk about racism. It made me sick. The only good thing was these Syrians became my friends, and because of our friendship, some of other American students stopped bothering them.

We really are all sinners, aren't we? Back then, Iranians hated Americans, Americans hated Iranians. Because of skin color, because of religion, because of politics, there was no compassion and love between us. Yet, I believe Jesus looked upon all four of the parties involved, Iranians, Syrians, white

Americans, African Americans, the exact same way. He saw us as we are, harassed, helpless, every one of us in need of a shepherd, and he had compassion on us.

People of God, I really believe Jesus did not come into the world, primarily as a teacher instructing us to follow commandments, or primarily as a Lord judging us as we break those commandments. I think he came into the world to have compassion for all people because indeed we are all harassed, helpless, and we need him to shepherd us. So, he came into the world to help and love and save us. What do you think?

The truth is Jesus spent his ministry teaching about the mercy, compassion, and forgiveness of God. So, when Jesus met sick and hurting people, he had compassion on them and healed them. When Jesus was faced with grieving families, he had compassion on them, and he raised a son, a daughter, and a brother from the dead. When Jesus met sinful people, he had compassion on them and forgave them. When Jesus saw just how harassed and helpless people were in this world, he had compassion on them. He helped and loved and saved them.

Furthermore, when Jesus saw this hurting, compassionless, and sinful, world, he chose to be crucified (nailed to a cross) for it. When Jesus saw just how harassed and helpless we are as people in this world, when he saw just how much we needed a shepherd to lead us, he became that shepherd, compassionately laying down his life down for us on the cross, so that he, the Lord, might free us from the powers of sin, evil, and death. He did this so that he might help us, love us, and save us in every way.

Yes, indeed, Jesus, your Savior and Lord, has an absolutely beautiful heart.

Therefore, my friends in Christ, I pray that however life is making you feel harassed and helpless, whether it's the coronavirus or something else, that you will see how Jesus looks on you and your life with great compassion. And yet, he will do much more. He will enter your life, to be with you in your struggle, to help you overcome your hardship, to heal from what hurts you, to guide you into new and brighter days, to strengthen you for your life, and to save you in every way.

However, I also pray you will see other people around you, here in this community and around the world, who are also harassed and helpless in life. Such people may be vastly different from you, from a different race or culture or religion, and still Jesus calls you as he called his first 12 disciples, to have compassion on them. He calls you to enter into their lives, to be with them in their struggles, to help them overcome their hardships, to guide them into new and brighter days, to strengthen them for their lives, and in some ways, if you are able, maybe even save them.

Perhaps when we do such things, with the help and inspiration of our shepherd Jesus, more and more of us will have a beautiful heart just like him. May it be so, Lord, may it be so.

Amen.