PUT ON…

Compassionate hearts, *Colossians 3:12-14*

Several of our deacons have been meeting regularly over the past couple of years to develop plans for implementing our elders' vision through improved communication and collaboration. Part of their efforts involves choosing an annual theme to direct their activities. They selected the following theme for this year:

Equipped for the mission: every disciple, every place

Their theme motivates our current sermon series, which explores the question, **"What does it look like to be equipped for the mission?"** We are focusing our study on Paul's letter to the Colossians because it records his instruction to his audience to "put on"[1] certain attitudes and practices (*Colossians 3:12-14*), which, together, form the portrait of an equipped disciple.

After reminding his readers of the inheritance God guaranteed them in "the kingdom of his beloved son" (*Colossians 1:12-13*), Paul urged the Colossian Christians to focus themselves on that kingdom by "seek[ing] the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God" (*Colossians 3:1*). But, Paul wrote, seeking has a specific look; it involves "put[ting] to death" the attitudes and practices inconsistent with Jesus' rule and kingdom and "put[ting] on" ones consistent with Jesus (*Colossians 3:5-14*). This lesson introduces an examination of the attitudes and practices Paul instructed the Colossians to "put on," beginning with "compassionate hearts" (*Colossians 3:12*).

Compassionate hearts

- "Compassionate hearts" expresses a deep feeling, an intensity of compassion, pity, or mercy. However, the Bible's context for that emotion focuses on God's compassion more than human compassion. For example:
    - The emotion "compassion" (Greek *oiktirō*) appears eight times in the New Testament and almost always refers to God's mercy (*cf. Luke 6:36; Romans 9:15; 12:1; 2 Corinthians 1:3; Hebrews 10:28; James 5:11*).
    - About 80% of the equivalent vocabulary in the Hebrew Bible (Hebrew word group *rḥm*) refers to God's "compassion."
- Luke's gospel clarifies the significance of the focus on God's compassion for the attitude Paul instructed the Colossians to "put on."
    - **"Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful"** (*Luke 6:36*).

[1] All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.

    - Luke's record of Jesus' teaching reveals that **"God's own character and behavior are the standard and measure of human action."**[2]
- Since God's compassion should shape our "compassionate hearts," we ought to look at the Bible's depiction of His compassion. Consider Psalm 103, David's poem about God's compassion.
    - David's poem meditates on God's self-revelation to Moses and Israel on Mount Sinai (*Psalm 103:1-7*).
    - But David's meditation does not focus on the rescue of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. Instead, he emphasizes God's forgiveness of the Israelites' sins (*Psalm 103:8-19*).
        - Despite being rescued from their oppressive slavery in Egypt, the Israelites responded to their redemption by repeatedly grumbling against God and quarreling with Moses (*Exodus 15:22-17:7*).
        - Instead of rejecting the obstinate and hostile Israelites, God extended compassionate forgiveness "as a father shows compassion to his children" (*Psalm 103:1-19*).
    - Psalm 103 reveals that God's compassion considers the circumstances of one's life and extends an unreasonably generous, love-motivated forgiveness that exceeds one's need.
- Joseph illustrates for us what it looks like to have one's heart shaped by God's compassion.
    - Years after being sold into slavery by his jealous brothers (*Genesis 37:12-36*), Joseph reunited with them (*Genesis 42-46*). However, Joseph – not his brothers – held a position of power (*Genesis 41:37-57*).
    - The death of Joseph and his brother's father worried the brothers; they feared Joseph hated them and would "pay [them] back for all the evil that [they] did to him" (*Genesis 50:15*).
    - However, Joseph comforted his brothers, assuring them that he would provide for them and their families. Even though he knew they "meant evil against" him, he responded with unreasonable generosity, forgiveness, and loving care (*Genesis 50:15-21*).

Applications

God-shaped compassion makes the concerns of others our concerns.

Putting on compassionate hearts makes us vulnerable to abuse.

God, not our perspective nor our concerns, defines our practice of compassion.

[2] Silva, M., ed. (2014). In *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis* (Second Edition, Vol. 3, p. 479). Zondervan