TITLE: An Example to Follow

TEXT: Ps. 51:1-2; 103:2-5, 13-14; Jonah 3:3-10, 4:1-11; Mt. 15:32; Mk. 1:38-42; 2 Co. 1: 3-4;

Col. 3:12-14

INTRODUCTION: This morning I want to talk about An Example to Follow.

Jesus is to be our ultimate example to follow in this life. He has many attributes that are worthy of our following. This morning I want to talk about possibly the most wonderful attribute of Jesus and that is compassion. For without Gods compassion none of us would be saved. We would all still be lost and separated from Him by our sin if it were not for His showing us compassion.

King David understood the compassion of God as it relates to our sin..  
 **Psalms 51:1-2(NIV)**  **1Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions.**  **2Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin.**

**Psalms 103:2-5(NIV)   
2Praise the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits—**  **3who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases,**  **4who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion,**  **5who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.**

**Psalms 103:13-14(NIV)**  **13As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;** **14for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.**

The Compassion of God is a wonderful thing.

The word compassion comes from the Hebrew:

***rakh'-am*; *compassion* ; by extension the *womb* (as *cherishing* the fetus); by implication, compassion, tender love, (great, tender) mercy, pity.**

It is interesting that ***rakh'-am—***compassion, carries the thought of the cherishing of the fetus inside the womb, tender love, great mercy.

We see an excellent example of the compassion of God in the story of Jonah.

The prophet Jonah is an Israelite. God commissions him to go to the Ninevites with a message of upcoming judgment if they do not repent of their great sins as a people and as a nation.

Jonah doesn’t want the assignment so he tried to run from God.

Jonah does not want anything to do with the possible repentance of Nineveh.

They are enemies of his people and have caused them much grief over the years.

Well, as the story goes, in Jonah’s trying to run away from God, and the assignment he has been given, he ends up in the belly of a whale for three days and while in that place has a change of heart and tells God, that if spared, he will go to Nineveh with Gods message.

**Jonah 3:3-10(NIV)   
3Jonah obeyed the word of the LORD and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very important city—a visit required three days.**(KJV. Three days in extent)  **4On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed: “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned.”    
5The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth.**  **6When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust.**  **7Then he issued a proclamation in Nineveh: “By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink.**

**8But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence.**  **9Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.”**  **10When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened.**

The Ninevites were a wicked people! They had done many despicable things before God. They were a constant thorn in the side of God’s chosen people Israel.

God sent His prophet Jonah to them with a message. A message that Jonah finally agreed to take to them, but when he got there he only gave them half of that message.

The message that God sent Jonah with was: repent or in 40 days Nineveh will be destroyed.

Jonah in his disdain for the Ninevites left out the first part and just said: In 40 days Nineveh will be destroyed!

Jonah left out the “repent or” part of the message because he wanted to see Gods judgment fall on Nineveh! He wanted to see Nineveh destroyed!

So in this story we see both compassion and un-compassion.

After Nineveh repents, from the king all the way down to the servants, God shows great compassion and spares the Ninevites.

Jonah goes to a hill outside the city and is hoping that God will still destroy the city even though it has repented.

Now God is trying to work on the hardened heart of Jonah and show His prophet this same compassion.

**Jonah 4:1-11(NIV)   
1But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry.    
2He prayed to the LORD, “O LORD, is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.    
3Now, O LORD, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live.”   
4But the LORD replied, “Have you any right to be angry?”   
5Jonah went out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city.    
6Then the LORD God provided a vine and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort and Jonah was very happy about the vine.    
7But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the vine so that it withered.    
8When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah’s head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, “It would be better for me to die than to live.”   
9But God said to Jonah, “Do you have a right to be angry about the vine?” “I do,” he said. “I am angry enough to die.”   
10But the LORD said, “You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight.**  **11But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and many cattle as well. Should I not be concerned about that great city?”**

In this last verse we see the motivation for Gods great compassion on the Ninevites.

**11But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left---Should I not be concerned about that great city?”**

Nineveh was a city that contained one hundred and twenty thousand people who could not tell their right hand from their left!

This is more than likely speaking about infant children.

Nineveh, a city with more than 120,000 children in it that were young enough that they didn’t yet know their right hand from their left!

God said: **Should I not be concerned about that great city?”**

The word God uses for concerned is:

***Khoos;* A primitive root; properly to *cover*, that is, (figuratively) to *compassionate:—*pity, regard, spare.**

God was saying to Jonah, Jonah you are more concerned about a stupid plant than you are about 120,000 small children!

Here the story ends and there are winners and losers.

God wins as His compassion is received in a positive way by the Ninevites.

The Ninevites win as they are spared the destruction of God.

It is only Jonah that is the apparent looser as we leave him sitting on a hillside pouting because of Gods compassion on a people he did not like.

How many times are we kind of like Jonah?

We rejoice when we see the compassion of God being poured out upon us or our family and friends, but do not get too overly excited when we see it being poured out on those we see as undeserving.

Possibly it is the biggest jerk in the office that gets the promotion.

Or the guy next door that only goes to Church on Christmas and Easter gets the new car while we are driving a bucket of bolts.

One of the things that Jesus illustrated to us the most when He was here was compassion.

**Matthew 15:32(NIV)**  **32Jesus called his disciples to him and said, “I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat. I do not want to send them away hungry, or they may collapse on the way.”**

And then Jesus performs one of His greatest miracles. He feeds 5000 people with a couple loves of bread and a couple small fish.

What spurred Him to do it? **“I have compassion for these people.**

**Mark 1:38-42(NIV)**  **38Jesus replied, “Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come.”**  **39So he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons.**  **40A man with leprosy£ came to him and begged him on his knees, “If you are willing, you can make me clean.”**  **41Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!”**  **42Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured.**

**41Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. “I am willing,” he said. “Be clean!”**

The Greek word translated here as compassion is:

**splagchnizomai (*splangkh-nid'-zom-ahee)***

**to have the *bowels* yearn, that is, (figuratively) *feel* *sympathy*, to *pity:*—have (be moved with) compassion.**

What was the purpose for the many, many displays of Christ’s compassion in Scripture?

**2 Corinthians 1:3-4(NIV) 3Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort,  4who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.**

Our God is compassionate! He is the **Father of compassion and the God of all comfort,    
4who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.**

The compassion of our God is to show us that we need to be compassionate also!

All the compassionate acts of Christ are to be examples to us to do the same.

Compassion is part of our calling as a Christian!

**Colossians 3:12-14(NIV)   
12Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.    
13Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.    
14And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.**

As Christians we have been called to clothe ourselves with compassion!

The word clothe comes from the Greek:

**enduō (*en-doo'-o)* in the sense of *sinking* into a garment); to *invest* with clothing (literally or figuratively):—array, clothe (with), endue, have (put) on.**

As Christians we are to put on compassion as we would put on a shirt or a blouse!

And just as we would not think of leaving the house in the morning without first putting on our clothing, we should not, as a Christian, leave the house without first clothing ourselves with compassion, the compassion of Jesus Christ!

I once read a tremendous example of this kind of compassion that we each should cloth ourselves with each and every day.

A nurse took the tired, anxious serviceman to the bedside. "Your son is here," she said to the old man.

She had to repeat the words several times before the patient's eyes opened. Heavily sedated because of the pain of his heart attack, he dimly saw the young uniformed Marine standing outside the oxygen tent.

He reached out his hand. The Marine wrapped his toughened fingers around the old man's limp ones, squeezing a message of love and encouragement. The nurse brought a chair so that the Marine could sit beside the bed. All through the night, the young Marine sat there in the poorly lighted ward, holding the old man's hand and offering him words of love and strength.

Occasionally, the nurse suggested that the Marine move away and rest awhile. He refused.

Whenever the nurse came into the ward, the Marine was oblivious of her and of the night noises of the hospital - the clanking of the oxygen tank, the laughter of the night staff members exchanging greetings, the cries and moans of the other patients. Now and then, she heard him say a few gentle words. The dying man said nothing, only held tightly to his son all through the night.

Along towards dawn, the old man died. The Marine released the now lifeless hand he had been holding and went to tell the nurse. While she did what she had to do, he waited. Finally, she returned. She started to offer words of sympathy, but the Marine interrupted her.

"Who was that man?" he asked.

The nurse was startled. "He was your father," she answered.

"No, he wasn't," the Marine replied. "I never saw him before in my life."

"Then why didn't you say something when I left you with him?"

"I knew right away there had been a mistake, but I also knew he needed his son, and his son just wasn't here. When I realized that he was too sick to tell whether or not I was his son, knowing how much he needed me, I stayed."

What an amazing example of the Compassion of Jesus Christ! Can’t you just picture Jesus doing something like that?

The question is—can we picture ourselves doing something like that?

We should because it is to this that we have been called!

**12Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion!**

I would dare say that each of us here this morning is compassionate toward our family and friends and brothers and sisters in Christ, and that is a good and wonderful thing.

But I don’t know that that is the compassion of Christ. At least not the full compassion of Christ.

The compassion of Christ is having compassion on the Ninevites of this world. Those people with whom we may strongly disagree or even dislike. Those who may have wronged us in some way or done things that we disapprove of.

The sad thing about the book of Jonah is that we don’t know if Jonah ever got it or not. Did he learn the lesson of compassion?

The book ends without telling us the answer…

I hope that he did, for what a blessing it would be to know that you had a part is seeing a whole nation of people come to repentance and faith in God….

We cannot answer for Jonah but we can answer for ourselves…

Has the compassion of Christ had its impact on us?

As God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved by Him, are we daily clothing ourselves with His compassion and allowing that compassion to be manifest in our life toward all those who cross our path, the deserving and the undeserving alike?

For that is the compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The compassion we are to clothe ourselves with.