

# *Believers Under Construction - Active Compassion*

*Bible Reading:*  
*Matthew 23: 23-26*  
*Isaiah 58: 1-14*

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They worked at it. They really did.  
Worked hard.  
Thought about it a lot.  
Tried to figure it out in a way that would show to other people.  
It was important to them -  
    “them” being a group of spiritual, religiously oriented folk in Jesus’ day.

They were focusing on the same thing that we’ve been focusing on this whole summer here at Calvin Church. Except, they didn’t just spend one summer on it. It was the preoccupation of their entire life. They were dedicated to it.  
    “it” being the desire to become spiritually mature;  
    all grown up in their day to day relationship with God.

Over the last few weeks we’ve talked about that here.  
Just to review, in previous weeks we’ve talked about:

- ! Prayer - growing deeper in our communion with the Lord
- ! Love - the commitment and maturing passion for Jesus and His people
- ! Doctrine - doctrine that really matters is doctrine that translates into action
- ! Worship - mature worship keeps the content as Christ; structures around four major moves of gathering, the Word, response and sending; and has mature mutual understanding and support when it comes to style.
- ! Ongoing - spiritual development never stops. Christians are like airplanes.... you either move forward or you drop.
- ! Witness - you can’t keep your faith-based relationship with Jesus to yourself. He gives it to us as a gift, a gift that we’re called to give away. And that’s why those of you who were here last week got a little sticky dot to put on your watch - a way to remind you to pray for an opportunity to share, in natural ways, something of the hope that Christ has placed in your heart - doing it gently.

We care about these things, right?  
So did the group of believers in Jesus’ day who wanted to be mature.

Imagine, then, what their blood pressure would have done when Jesus turned to them and spoke these words -

**MATTHEW 23:23-26 P.1117**

Says the Son of God:

*“You have neglected the more important matters.....”*

    The formal stuff of religion is there - right down to the penny when it comes to dropping coin in the collection plate. And that’s good. You don’t want to neglect that side of things –  
    ***but don’t stop there***

V.24: *You should have practised the latter, without neglecting the former.*

Can you see what those “*latter*” things are that God’s son is concerned about?

Justice.

Mercy.

Faithfulness.

    Spiritual maturity cannot be attained unless these are factored in.

One of the key ideas in the Bible is that of ***righteousness***. Found over 230 times. At it’s most basic level, *righteousness* means “*something that is the way it was meant to be.*” Human conduct, social order, nature’s rhythms....

Go to God's original design, the creation spec sheet and see how He in perfection made things to be;  
The **right** way - righteousness.

There's another bible terms which goes hand-in-glove with righteousness. Has the same root word in the original ancient language. This one is found over 130 times.

**Justice.**

It means putting righteousness into practice – rolling out God's design and intent for creation. And this is the word that Jesus uses in Matthew 23.

The Holy One who created this world loves it with a hands-on love. Cares deeply about what happens to it, and to those living in it;

to the ecosystems - rocks, soil, plants and animals  
to the people - nations, tribal groups, cities, rural routes, and individuals.  
to you - God made you, and loves you with a hands-on love.

He cares deeply about how we behave in it;  
what we do with it.

He wants to see us living justice - getting it right.

He wants to see us living mercy - that means making it right where it's broke.

He wants to see us living faithfulness - that means living justice and mercy in an ongoing way.....

..... not just once in a while

..... not just a bit here and a bit there.

Not just in our private thoughts, not just in personal devotions, or in personal morals – but beyond that in broad ways.

God is passionate that; about getting things right -- **justice**;

He is passionate about taking that which is messed up and fixing it;

that which is out of place and moving it to where it belongs;

that which is missing and restoring it;

that which is faded and polishing it up..... **mercy**.

It is His holy passion all through history..... **faithfulness**.

That's the whole point of this central symbol of our faith, which stands here to my right - the cross.

The ultimate symbol that what happens here on earth, what happens to you and me — what happens **matters** to Him.

He wants it to go **right**.

He wants **justice** to be done;

justice in a way that will bring and support vibrant, joyful, wholesome living.

The cross – 'cause things **weren't** going right for us. We were caught in dead-end, hell-bound living, on a fast train to eternal horror, separated from God, out of His family.

The cross – where Jesus took our curse, died our death, suffered our fate, endured holy rejection, carried our burden.

did it so that justice could be done and we could be brought back in to the family of God; be adopted as holy children of a heavenly Father; be taken off the destruction road and put on a train to glory; heaven-bound living; the forever presence of the Holy Spirit with us.

The cross is right here this morning my friends to remind us that Jesus is, even today, about the process of taking the messed-up, mixed-up, dark and painful parts of our lives and, bit by bit, working on putting them back together.

Putting things right.

Making them count.

Getting them the way they should be.

That's His holy passion.

And we who are on a quest for spiritual maturity need to understand that as much as the Lord wants it be going right for us personally,

so much He wants that for every other person sitting here.

so much He wants that:

for the person stuck with minimum wage work unable to cope with sky rocketing rental rates in  
Ottawa-Carleton

for the aboriginal stuck in squalid living conditions in a northern reserve.

for the child captured and forced into military service under some African war lord.

for the worker in some overseas textile firm with feudal-like employee standards giving huge  
dividends to North American shareholders.

So much He wants that for the globe itself.

the streams and rivers;

ozone layer and wind currents;

rain forests and fish stocks.

If you were to take the time to read through the entire bible in one swoop,

one of the things that you would be struck by is how often God sticks up for the little guy, the  
disadvantaged person, the one caught holding the short end of the stick..... mired in injustice, in need  
of mercy, a victim of social unfaithfulness.

Again and again God calls His people to watch out for, to care for, to help the poor, the widow,  
the orphan, little children.

Again and again and again and again and again.....

At least as often as the Bible speaks about maintaining sexual purity or about issues of worship!

Jesus himself laid claim to this mission –

*The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because He has anointed me  
to preach good news to the poor.*

*He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners  
and recovery of sight for the blind,*

*to release the oppressed,*

*to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour. (Luke 4)*

Understand that, as you hear these words from the prophet Isaiah:

#### **ISAIAH 58:1-14 P.843**

To get the meaning of the passage you'll need to understand that fasting, bowing one's head, lying on  
sackcloth and ashes were religious rituals of great importance in those days. They were seen as symbols of  
someone who was truly repentant of their sins and desirous of serving the Lord; someone dedicating their life to  
the Lord.

Like standing in front of this church and making profession of faith, or responding when an altar call is  
given, or making sure you came and were involved in every worship service and bible study the church offered.

Good things - but not enough on their own, says the prophet.

If they don't translate into daily life, if what happens in the building on Sunday bears no relationship to  
what happens out there Monday to Saturday, if in that way your faith proves to be.....

here's the word....

***irrelevant***

-- well.... forget it. God's not interested!

Our Lord wants us to put our money where our religious mouth is.

Are you grateful for being saved? Then show it. Save others.

- share your food with the hungry
- provide the poor wanderer with shelter
- clothe the naked
- spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry
- satisfy the needs of the oppressed

Earthly justice and mercy become our response to Christ's eternal justice and mercy granted us. What happens on the outside is a mirror of what has happened to us on the inside.

As a nation, as a community, as a church, as individuals, we simply cannot fool ourselves into thinking that a lifestyle where it's everyone for themselves and may the best one make it to the top, where the one with the most toys wins, where it's take what the market will bear and too bad for the rest;

- we can't walk this road and think that the Lord will send a blessing.

You know that crazy slogan: "*God helps those who help themselves.*"

It's about as ungodly a phrase as I can think of.

The truth is, and Isaiah tells us

*"God helps those who help others."*

Believers, churches who waltz their way through life without a second glance at those around them; who glibly receive all the riches in life

- spiritual, emotional and material -

all the riches that the Lord would shower on them without a thought as to how they can care for those less fortunate than themselves -

they are believers and churches that break the heart of God. They may cause Him to take a hard second look, and to withdraw some of the blessings and privileges that he would otherwise have sent their way.

And where there is no response at all, the Lord may even begin to question whether or not the faith that the person claims to have is genuine.

Tell me, friends?

Can my faith be truly be genuine if it doesn't show at all;  
if there is absolutely no relationship with daily life?

Tell me..... can it?

In this world, every 60 seconds, 30 people die from hunger and related diseases. That's the equivalent of 300 jumbo jets crashing, without survivors, **every single day.**

UNICEF estimates that global giving of \$25 billion per year through the year 2000 could control the major childhood diseases, halve child malnutrition, reduce child deaths by 4 million a year, bring safe water and sanitation to all communities, provide a basic education for all children, and make family planning universally available.

To put that in perspective, \$31 billion was spent last year on beer. \$50 billion on cigarettes in Europe alone. \$32 billion on toys and sporting goods.

How can we respond? As people who have been given **SO** incredibly much - physically, socially, spiritually -

As we live our lives before the face of God, **how** can we respond?

Let me offer a few suggestions:

1. Manage our lifestyle

Let's reign in our spending. How many of us don't fritter away a lot of our resources in insignificant ways? Perhaps budgeting carefully, or tracking what we spend can help us gain better control. Let's also evaluate our wants and needs.

2. Share The Wealth

Remember the slogan: "*Think global. Act local.*"

We can share the wealth here in our community. That's why we have regular food drives and deaconal offerings. Thank God for those privileges!

On a wider level we can give to Christian Reformed World Relief - through them we are helping 100,000 families with 300,000 children conquer hunger & poverty! Your giving supports Christian community development projects in more than 30 countries world wide. Thank you so very much!!

3. Lend A Hand

- volunteer at food banks, soup kitchens or Union Mission
- short-term volunteer work with CRWRC

-WARNING: this could prove to be life-changing. I remember one person, who was a chronic complainer - one of these fellows who always found something wrong wherever he was. He began to help out in local welfare hotel, and guess what. The complaining stopped. He even smiled sometimes.

Another fellow went overseas for a short-term stint with CRWRC and came back a changed man. He was talking much more freely about his faith; more generous; happy and helpful.

The apostle James wrote:

*"Anyone who sets himself up as religious by talking a good game is self-deceived. This kind of religion is hot air and only hot air. Real religion, the kind that passes muster before God the Father, is this: Reach out to the homeless and loveless in their plight, and guard against corruption from the godless world."* (Jas 1.27)

We who have lived in our affluent, capitalistically-driven Canadian society for any number of years can't help but become affected by it. It begins to influence the way we look at life- at others, at ourselves.

May the Lord heal us from that.

May He give us eyes to **really** see;

to see our neighbourhood,  
our province,  
our land,  
and our world

to see them through the lenses of faith;

to see our world biblically,  
as God would see it --

-- and to act accordingly!

Becoming, in this way,  
truly mature.