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Sermon Notes

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Corporate Compassion

Romans 12:15

Yesterday was one of the happiest moments in my ministry... as you know, I had the privilege of performing the wedding for my son, Nathaniel, and his wife, Dorothy... and one of the richest parts of all was CELEBRATING HIS JOY with YOU, our FBC family... to see a church come together, put aside their own concerns and "rejoice with those who rejoice"... HOW RICH we are to be a part of the family of God! Some of those who came to celebrate have themselves gone through immense sorrow recently, and they were able out of the love of Christ to REJOICE WITH THOSE WHO REJOICE!

One of the saddest moments in my ministry... a funeral for a woman with no family nor friends... organized and paid for by a neighbor, an acquaintance who'd known this woman for less than a year

Loneliness... isolation... being severed from all meaningful human relationships is one of the worst conditions any human being can face in this world... feeling that there's not a person on the face of the earth who knows or cares whether I live or die... no one who knows or cares whether I'm happy or sad... when I have good news, I have no one to tell it to; when I have bad news, I have no one to cry with me.

God has willed that none of His children should ever face this terrible scourge of loneliness; rather, He has willed to settle each of His sons and daughters in a royal family called "the church"... with brothers and sisters who will walk with us through life, and who will rejoice when we rejoice and who will mourn when we mourn.

Romans 12:15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

My central idea in this morning's text is that a healthy local church should overflow with CORPORATE COMPASSION... with a deep-seated, heart-felt sympathy for each of its members; that when any member is blessed at any level, that blessing is multiplied by others sharing it with them; and that when any member is afflicted by any sorrow, that burden is shared by many others as well.

I YEARN for FBC to be that kind of a church!! An oasis of compassion in a shockingly indifferent and occasionally hostile world

I. Our Cold-Hearted World

A. Stunned by a Phrase

1. WWI: 1.5 million Armenians were systematically slaughtered by the Turks
2. What really struck me was a haunting phrase, **“The world was largely indifferent to their fate.”**
3. LARGELY INDIFFERENT to their fate
4. The problem of indifference is as old as Cain and Abel:

Genesis 4:9 Then the LORD said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" "I don't know," he replied. "Am I my brother's keeper?"

B. We Also See it in: The Parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10)

The priest saw the bleeding man and passed by on the other side

The Levite also saw him and also passed by on the other side

Jesus makes it very plain that the needs of the man were obvious to both the priest and Levite... but so also he makes it plain how much both were indifferent to the man's plight

THEY JUST DIDN'T CARE!!

C. The Natural Heart: Indifferent to the joys and sorrow of others

D. The Only Remedy: The Gospel of Jesus Christ

E. Along with that... it is a CONGREGATION of Christians who are committed to sacrificial caring, sacrificial bonding with each other

F. This Morning: A Call to Congregational Compassion

Romans 12:15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.

II. Our Compassionate Lord

A. The Topic: Emotions

1. Two emotions isolated here: joy and sorrow
2. We are commanded to FEEL things are NOT HAPPENING TO US because they ARE HAPPENING to a Christian brother/sister
3. Can we control our emotions?

- a. Are we slaves to our feelings, as though there's no accounting for them?
- b. Many think, **"I can't help it... it's just how I feel!"**
- c. Others might know that their emotions are wrong, but they don't know what to do about it
- d. They may know that they SHOULD feel something here or there, but if they're honest, they DON'T
 - i) They hear someone else's good news, and know they should feel happy... so they act as though they do; but inside they feel almost nothing
 - ii) Or they may see a friend from church very down; they ask "What's wrong?" and the person proceeds to pour out a sad story of a series of trials that they are going through... we actually may feel a motion of irritation toward the person and wonder why they have to dump all that on them
- e. But the command from the Lord through the Apostle Paul implies that we are RESPONSIBLE to have compassion

B. The Compassion of Christ

1. Our emotional life is based on our creation in the image of God and our redemption in the pattern of Christ...
2. Greek philosophers, especially Stoics, proposed a god who was entirely free from emotions, perfectly APATHEIC to the condition of any other being... *apatheia* means "no feeling"; a mind in perfect equilibrium, not disturbed by anything outside of him
3. BUT the God of the Bible is clearly revealed as a merciful and compassionate God

Exodus 3:7-8 The LORD said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. ⁸ So I have come down to rescue them..."

Isn't it amazing that the ONLY grief or sorrow God ever feels is because He has CHOSEN to link his heart with ours and to feel with great compassion the sufferings that our sin as a human race has brought us to!!!

The perfect display of God's compassion, of God's WILLINGNESS to suffer grief and pain because of something OUTSIDE OF HIM is in the **incarnation of Christ**

C. The Compassion of Christ

1. Jesus showed an amazingly wide range of perfect and godly emotions in the days of his incarnation
2. BUT BY FAR the most common one described was compassion
 - a. Jesus had compassion on a leper in Mark 1:40-42...

Mark 1:40-42 *A man with leprosy came to him and begged him on his knees, "If you are willing, you can make me clean." ⁴¹ Filled with compassion, Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" ⁴² Immediately the leprosy left him and he was cured.*

- b. On a widow burying her son, her only son... it was in the town of Nain, and Jesus came upon the funeral procession

Luke 7:13-15 *And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her and said to her, "Don't cry!" ¹⁴ Then he came up and touched the coffin, and the bearers stood still. And he said, "Young man, I say to you, arise." ¹⁵ And the dead man sat up and began to speak, and Jesus gave him to his mother.*

- c. Jesus had compassion on crowds that were hungry before feeding the 5000... he was worried they'd faint on the way home

D. The Holy Spirit WORKS Compassion in us IMITATING CHRIST

III. The TEXT: God's Command to His People: Compassion

Romans 12:15 *Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.*

A. The Context: an Overview of the Gospel Mercies of God

Romans 12:1 *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices*

1. Eleven chapters of the gospel of Jesus Christ... a clear display of the MERCIES of God to sinners like us
2. The gospel is the POWER of God for salvation from self-centered apathy

Romans 1:16 *I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes*

3. Our great sinfulness: Romans 1-3

Romans 3:10-18 *"There is no one righteous, not even one; ¹¹ there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. ¹² All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."*

4. God's great provision: Romans 3:21-26... Christ our propitiation

5. Justification by faith alone: Romans 3:27-Romans 4
6. Sanctification: Battling indwelling sin by the power of the Spirit

Romans 7: The GOOD I WANT TO DO, I DON'T DO!!

- a. Romans 8: the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit

Romans 8:4 in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

7. IN VIEW OF ALL THIS... what kind of life ought you to live?

Romans 12:1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy

8. First commitment: vertical... present yourself to God as a living sacrifice
 9. Then Romans 12-16: Horizontal... living in a love relationship with others
- B. The Supernatural Life: Only by the Spirit can this happen!!!!
- C. Aspects of the Supernatural Life in Romans 12:9-21

Romans 12:9-14 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. ¹¹ Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. ¹² Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³ Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. ¹⁴ ¶ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

IV. Verse 15: Rejoicing with Those Who Rejoice

A. What It Means to “REJOICE WITH THOSE WHO REJOICE”

1. First... it should go without saying that we're talking about GODLY joys, not sinful things
2. We're not going to rejoice that someone has developed a fool-proof way to cheat the IRS on their income tax
3. And it means GENUINE JOY... not faked or for show... for someone else's success, gift, blessing, honor, victory, elevation, purchase, promotion, graduation, delight, enrichment

B. Perhaps the More Difficult of the Two

1. Martyn Lloyd-Jones makes the point: it is much harder to rejoice with those who rejoice than it is to mourn with those who mourn

2. The mourning person is DOWN, and the other person is ABOVE THEM emotionally and can reach down from a superior position
3. But someone who is REJOICING is usually UP, doing better than you, prospering in some way that you're not and it's hard for the pride to reach up and add to the person's joy
4. What makes it difficult? One word: the FLESH... the sin nature... selfishness, covetousness, that **green-eyed monster of jealousy**
 - a. We think "It should have been ME! Why wasn't it ME?"
 - b. Then we may even direct it toward God and feel insecure about our relationship with God... "Does God love me too? Isn't there any blessing for me?"
 - c. We see everything from our point of view, what is best for ME, how it impacts ME, what makes ME happy
 - d. It is very hard not to feel a sense of COMPETITION with other people for the limited resources and blessings on earth...

C. Scenarios

1. **Healing**: you lose a loved one to cancer; six months later, someone else's loved one is healed from cancer; they call to tell you the good news!!
2. **Relationships and Marriage**: how does a single girl who yearns with every fiber of her being to be married, who has been consistently disappointed in relationships feel GENUINE JOY when her best friend calls her with the exciting news that she just got ENGAGED! "Do you want to see the ring?!!!"
 - a. "Will anyone ever love me?" "Will I be single my whole life?" "Is there something wrong with me?"
 - b. "God, WHAT ABOUT ME??? IS THERE ANYONE FOR ME???"
3. **Children**: childless couple rejoicing with other couples as they have babies, as they celebrate their children's development steps and cute things they do
 - a. Or again, when you DO have kids, but other people's kids are excelling in ways yours aren't... excelling athletically, academically, or even spiritually...
 - b. Your best friend is a proud dad of a college graduate who graduated first in his class and will be going on to medical school, while your 21-year old son is struggling to find himself in life

- c. How do you “rejoice with those who rejoice” when all you feel is a sense of shame about your own son and how he’s turning out

4. Finances, Possessions, Lifestyle

Exodus 20:17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house... or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

- a. But a brother in Christ gets a new house, or a new car, or a raise, or a promotion, and he tells you about it... you want to “rejoice with those who rejoice,” but instead, covetousness robs your joy
- b. You see other families doing better than you are; they don’t seem to struggle, they are able to buy things you can’t; they just seem to have a more comfortable lifestyle than you folks do

- 5. Honors, awards, achievements:** any diploma, or recognition, or significant award, or medal is a cause for celebration... but jealousy can rob that!

6. Spiritual blessings

- a. This especially extends to the area of spiritual blessings: of genuinely expressing joy over the Father pouring out spiritual blessings on other people
- b. So for churches to celebrate when other churches are baptizing a lot of people, and not worrying about our “market share”
- c. For us to be really happy when other brothers and sisters in Christ are growing amazingly, or are developing spiritual gift ministries that the Lord is abundantly blessing
- d. Or when other people are seeing answers to prayer, or are able to memorize scripture, or have far greater gifts as teachers or in faith or as administrators than you do, and being able genuinely to praise God for that

D. HOW Do We Do This?

1. Start with CONVERSION... the fulfillment of this command flows from a transformed nature through the gospel
- a. “Cain-like” wickedness

Genesis 4:4-5 The LORD looked with favor on Abel and his offering, ⁵ but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry, and his face was downcast.

1 John 3:12 Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous.

- b. The root issue there: the person cannot rejoice with someone else because they are unconverted and totally committed to themselves
 - c. Be sure that you are IN CHRIST, having received the free gift of salvation, and of the indwelling Spirit, and of a heart of flesh replacing your old heart of stone
2. Understand that GOD NEVER RUNS OUT, and there's PLENTY OF BLESSING FOR EVERYONE
- a. There is ENOUGH BLESSING FOR EVERYONE!! But not everyone gets the same array of blessings! Or the same quantity
 - i) Imagine there being competition among the 5000 for the loaves and fishes... how foolish that would be!!
 - ii) What would the point of that be? There will be PLENTY FOR EVERYONE to go around
 - iii) Be happy that others are eating their loaves and fishes even though you haven't gotten yours yet!!
 - iv) Christ hasn't forgotten you... BE PATIENT
3. Thank God MORE for your own blessings!

Ephesians 1:3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.

Hasn't God already blessed you enough by electing you, drawing you, converting you, forgiving all your sins, giving you the seal of the Spirit, adopting you into his family, and promising you a certain place in heaven? Do you really need more than all that to be happy?

4. Pray more for others... that they would be richly blessed!
- a. Prayer makes us CARE MORE for each other... THANKFUL because this was what we prayed for for that other person
 - b. Especially go after areas of your own vulnerability
 - c. Childless couples should pray for other couples to have children
 - d. Those recently bereaved should pray for the healing of others

e. The idea: your own suffering can make you much more desirous that others NOT experience the same suffering you've had

5. Thank God for your own afflictions, shortcomings, weaknesses,

2 Corinthians 12:10 ... when I am weak, then I am strong.

6. Ask God to WORK THIS IN YOU by the Holy Spirit! This is a supernatural grace from God!

7. Understand the doctrine of the unity of the Body of Christ

1 Corinthians 12:26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

E. Focus Especially on Spiritual Joys!!

1. We should rejoice when other people are CONVERTED!!

i) Three Parables of "Lost and Found" in Luke 15

ii) Lost sheep, lost coin, lost son; All three end in celebrations

Luke 15:5-6 ... he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.'

Luke 15:9 ... she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.'

Luke 15:23-24 Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. ²⁴ For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.

Only the ELDER BROTHER refused to come in and celebrate

b. So, when we come to FBC and there's a baptism, we should CELEBRATE... rejoice with someone who's rejoicing!

Charles Spurgeon: "[Dear friends], if you do not praise God for souls snatched from the jaws of hell and, by divine grace, taught to walk in the way of heaven, what will you praise Him for? If heaven itself is glad, you who hope to go to heaven, will you not participate in the joy?"

2. We should celebrate the advance of the gospel anywhere in the world

3. We should rejoice when other people are disciplined

a. At the core of a culture of discipleship is a culture of celebrating other people's growth in Christ...

- i) We should rejoice when other people GROW spiritually, are putting sins to death, are praying more than ever before
- ii) We should celebrate when someone finishes memorizing a book of the Bible
- iii) We should celebrate when they invite their first person to church, or take a bold faith step and go on a mission trip

V. Mourning With Those Who Mourn

I want to ask four questions of this as well: 1) What does it mean? 2) Why Is It Difficult? 3) What Blessings Come from It? 4) How Can We Do It?

A. What Does this Mean?

- 1. To “mourn with those who mourn” is to have your heart wrapped up in the condition of another...
- 2. To be genuinely MOVED with the sorrow of another person; to have your heart melt, to grieve as though it were happening to you
- 3. It is a conformity to Christ in his compassions for sinners in their suffering, as we've seen

Isaiah 53:3 a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering

Isaiah 53:4 Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows

He TOOK UP our sin poisons, our sorrows into Himself, like sucking the venom of a rattlesnake out of the leg of a friend

This is what it means to “mourn with those who mourn”

- 4. You hear of misery and MOVE TOWARD IT, not shrinking back away from it
 - a. You go to the house of mourning that had a recent death and you comfort the grief-stricken family
 - b. You hear of a sister in Christ whose boyfriend of several years, whom she was hoping would propose to her, has actually broken up with her... you call, you go over there
 - c. You reach out to a lonely person, and draw them close... maybe the single man or woman who doesn't seem to know anyone well and is suffering in loneliness

Mark Dever did this for me at one of the lowest points in my life; he called me at home and said, “Andy, who’s loving you right now?”

- d. The causes of sorrow are so many in this world that I can scarcely list them all: medical issues, financial troubles, relational disappointments, loneliness, unemployment, academic struggles, failures with besetting sin, childlessness, marital troubles... whatever causes SORROW...
 - e. YOU HEAR OF MISERY AND MOVE TOWARD IT!!
 - f. Some call it the “ministry of PRESENCE”... being there... like Job’s friends, only BETTER!!
5. Special focus: SPIRITUAL troubles... sin troubles
- a. The greatest misery in the world is caused by sin
 - b. When someone is trapped in sin, it is COMPASSION that moves others in the church to step TOWARD that person and restore them gently
 - c. The Apostle Paul was amazing in his compassion for other Christians who were SINNING...

2 Corinthians 11:28-29 Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

- d. The CULTURE of DISCIPLESHIP calls on us to move TOWARD spiritual weakness, habitual sin, faults and failures and HELP THE PERSON GROW

B. Why Is It Difficult?

- 1. Primary reason, the FLESH... naturally INDIFFERENT
- 2. Obviously, this is painful to do, and exhausting; other people’s misery can DRAIN YOU
- 3. You worry that you won’t have enough resources... time, energy, money... needy people are, well, NEEDY!!!
- 4. I knew someone once a number of years ago, every time I saw that person and asked “How ya doing?”, he would have some dreary, negative thing to say; at one point, he answered, “You don’t really care how I’m doing!”
- 5. We dread such people, and such people can drain us

6. Don't be the PRIEST and LEVITE... who sees misery and gets as far away from it as possible

C. What Blessings Come From It?

1. Bringing glory to God as you are more and more conformed to Him
2. Feeling the power of the Spirit of Christ moving within us... our OWN maturity comes from mourning with those who mourn
3. Partnership with Christ by His Spirit as He works spiritual compassion in us
4. Realism about the world we're in: this is not heaven yet, and if everything is going well in your world, you can be sure God has given you extra resources to help others who are suffering

2 Corinthians 8:15 as it is written: "He who gathered much did not have too much, and he who gathered little did not have too little."

If God has richly blessed you financially, and with good health, and a sweet family unity, and good insights into the Scriptures, and a clear conscience, and many spiritual gifts, He didn't do it for YOU ALONE, so you could be so happy and healthy and holy... He STOCKPILED THOSE RESOURCES for others as well

5. Unity in the body... growth in Body Life

1 Corinthians 12:26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.

6. Attractive evangelistic power when the outside world says, "Behold, how they love one another!"... especially as we sacrificially give financially to those who are suffering in our midst
7. A reward in heaven:

Matthew 25:34-36 Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.'

D. How Can We Do It?

1. Start with PRAYER FOR YOURSELF... honest, soul-searching prayer: tell God what He already knows about you—you're not very compassionate toward those who are suffering

- a. Ask God to change your heart
 - b. Ask Christ to make your heart compassionate like His was and is
 - c. Ask Him to WORK compassion in you by His Spirit
2. Move to PRAYER FOR OTHERS... ask God to show you five suffering people to pray for daily for a month... make sure they're of various types of suffering
 - a. A SICK person who needs healing
 - b. A FINANCIALLY troubled person who needs resources
 - c. A LONELY person who needs friends
 - d. A PERSON STRUGGLING WITH SIN
 - e. A SINGLE person who would love to be married
 3. Next step... reach out to these people and tell them you're praying for them; ask for more details; LISTEN with a compassionate heart
 4. Keep alert as to the suffering in the church
 - a. Ask the elders if they know of people who are mourning or struggling and need prayer and encouragement
 5. Care about brothers and sisters around the world who are suffering
 - a. The persecuted church

Romans 15:30 I urge you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in my struggle by praying to God for me.

- b. People in prison

Hebrews 13:3 Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

E. Culture of Evangelism

1. Let's MOURN with those who mourn as lost people
2. Let your heart be SOFT toward the suffering of the elect who are not yet converted

Matthew 9:36-38 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. ³⁷ Then he said to

his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. ³⁸ Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

F. Culture of Discipleship

1. Mentors allow their hearts to be wrapped up in the ups and downs of immature Christians who are growing
2. You celebrate with their victories... but you also GRIEVE with their defeats
3. You come alongside them as they grow and share the journey with them

VI. Our Heavenly Destination: Shared Joys, No Sorrows

A. Jonathan Edwards: Heaven is a world of love

1. Perfect world... no death, mourning, crying, pain
2. We will NEVER AGAIN "mourn with those who mourn"
3. BUT we will "rejoice with those who rejoice" in ways we can scarcely imagine now
4. We will rejoice with the elect from every nation in how God worked specifically in their lives to bring them to saving faith
5. There will be a "NUMBER GREATER THAN ANYONE CAN COUNT" for you to do this with
6. You will be so enlarged in your hearts, free from selfishness, free from time constraints, free from petty jealousy
7. You will be able to celebrate the HONORS that other Christians get as though you yourself were being honored
8. You will be able to rejoice in the glory that other Christians have, even if it's greater than yours
9. You will be able to delight in the heavenly inheritance of others... their piece of the New Earth that will be assigned to them... no jealousy, no coveting, just SHARED JOY
10. Above all, we will all rejoice together at seeing God and the Lamb in full glory!!