

Hungering for God Series, Part-5: Reflecting The Purpose that God Chose for Fasting By Cultivating Christ's Compassion For Our Neighbors

Isaiah 58:1-14

Our Almighty God is not prejudiced, He is not unjust, nor is He oppressive.

Our Great God has immense compassion for the poor, the orphans, the widows, the oppressed, the afflicted, and the outcasts.

GOD UNCHANGING SOCIAL COMPASSION

God's unchanging concern for His people to reflect, support, and seek a just social treatment of fellow humans is a constant theme in the Scriptures.

From the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible) to the Prophets (the last 17 books of the Bible), and everywhere in between: God speaks with a consistent voice about the desire He has for justice, mercy, and compassion.

The Apostles Paul & Peter often spoke on God's behalf concerning societal moral issues.

They spoke of the moral contamination of a society when the sins of homosexuality, debauchery and other forms of immorality are unchecked. They spoke of God's concerns for society: while there was an openly gay Emperor. Yet Paul & Peter each went on to affirm that we still were to honor any Emperor, even Nero, as King: despite their more perfidy. Paul addressed wide rages of social issues as they related to God's just laws, such as in:

1 Timothy 1:9-10 (NIV) We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for **lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, 10 for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers**—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine

In the Old Testament we find even more explicit descriptions of the evils of society that God's Word addresses. Here is a brief survey¹ of just what those key prophets, whom God prompted, proclaimed about what exactly was God's will for a just society.

Amos: Served 8th Century BC²

¹ Drawn from an article by **J. Carl Laney**, (1990), *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 147 (585), 35–43.

² Amos prophesied to Israel during the reigns of Uzziah (791-739 B.C.) and Jeroboam II (793-753 B.C.), when both kingdoms enjoyed peace and prosperity unequalled since the reign of Solomon.

The sins condemned by Amos include exploitation and oppression of the poor and needy (4:1; 5:11; 8:4, 6), corruption of justice and honesty (5:7, 10; 6:12), excessive indulgence (6:4), and general disregard for the laws of God (2:8; 8:5).

Hosea: Served 8th Century BC³

The sins of Hosea's day included harlotry (4:11, 18), false dealings (4:2; 7:1), violence and bloodshed (4:2; 6:8–9), stealing (4:2; 7:1), drunkenness (4:11; 7:5), idolatry (4:12; 8:4; 13:2), and rebellion against God (9:15; 13:16).

Micah: Served 8th Century BC⁴

The societal sins Micah rebuked are basically those against the common man.

These include plundering and oppressing the poor and defenseless (2:2, 8–9), perversion of justice through bribery and dishonest business practices (3:11; 6:11; 7:3), and violence and bloodshed (6:12; 7:2).

Isaiah: Served 8th / 7th Century (739-686) BC⁵

The sins Isaiah rebuked included idolatry (2:8; 48:5), injustice (1:21, 23; 5:7; 10:1–2; 59:8), bloodshed (5:7; 59:7), rebellion (1:5; 57:4); neglect of widows and orphans (1:23; 10:2), excessive indulgence in wine and strong drink (5:11; 28:1–7), and oppression of the poor (3:14–15; 10:2).

Zephaniah: Served 7th Century (640-622) BC⁶

Zephaniah was concerned about the spiritual degeneracy of the people, the priests, and the leaders. He condemned rebellion and oppression (3:1), unbelief (3:2), immorality among leaders (3:3), and disrespect for the Law and holy things (3:4).

Habakkuk: Served 7th Century (609-605) BC⁷

Habakkuk condemned the sins of both the Judeans and Chaldeans. These included violence (1:2; 2:12, 17), oppression (1:4), disregard for the Law (1:4), perversion of justice (1:4), plundering (2:8), inhumanity to man (2:10–11, 15), and idolatry (2:18–19).

Jeremiah: Served 7th / 6th Century (627-586) BC⁸

Jeremiah was a prophet intensely interested in society and the religious condition of the people. **The sins he rebuked included** immorality (2:33; 3:8; 5:7–8; 7:9), oppression of the poor (5:28; 7:6), and perversion of justice (7:5).

Ezekiel: Served 6th Century (592-575) BC⁹

The sins of Israelite society condemned or rebuked by Ezekiel included oppression of the poor, widows, and orphans (18:12, 16; 22:29), bloodshed (22:3–4), and sexual immorality (18:11; 22:10–11).

Zechariah: Served 6th Century (520-518) BC¹⁰

³ Hosea began his public ministry in the reign of Israel's King Jeroboam II (793-753 B.C.) and continued into the reign of Hezekiah (728-686 B.C.).

⁴ Micah carried out his ministry during the reigns of Jotham (750-731 B.C.), Ahaz (743-715 B.C.), and Hezekiah (728-686 B.C.).

⁵ Isaiah began his ministry in the year of King Uzziah's death (739 B.C.) and continued prophesying until at least the death of Hezekiah (686 B.C.).

⁶ Zephaniah ministered in the days of Josiah king of Judah (640-609 B.C.), before the great revival of 621 B.C.

⁷ The ministry of Habakkuk probably took place early in the reign of Jehoiakim (609-597 B.C.), before the first invasion of the Babylonians (Chaldeans) in 605 B.C. (2 Kings 24:1–2).

⁸ Jeremiah was commissioned as a prophet during the reign of Josiah in 627 B.C., and he continued his ministry in Judah through the fall of Jerusalem (586 B.C.).

⁹ Ezekiel began his prophetic ministry in 592 B.C. and continued to minister to the exiles in Babylon for at least 27 years (29:17).

¹⁰ Zechariah entered his prophetic ministry in 520 B.C., just two months after Haggai's first oracle. His last dated prophecy is two years later (518 B.C.).

The sins he condemned included a neglect of justice (7:9), oppression of widows, orphans, and strangers (7:10).

Malachi: Served 5th Century (432-431) BC¹¹

The sins of Judah included perversion of justice (2:9), and oppression of the helpless (3:5).

THE APPLICATION OF THE STUDY

Our Almighty God is not prejudiced, He is not unjust, nor is He oppressive.

Our Great God has immense compassion for the poor, the orphans, the widows, the oppressed, the afflicted, and the outcasts. God's unchanging concern for His people to reflect, support, and seek a just social treatment of fellow humans is a constant theme in the Scriptures.

God's prophets in Israel confronted the social issues of Israelite society. The evils the prophets rebuked included the following:

- (1) Any exploitation or oppression of the poor, orphans, widows, and aliens,
- (2) Any perversion of justice,
- (3) Any dishonest business practices,
- (4) Any excessive indulgence in wine and strong drink,
- (5) All violence of any sort, including bloodshed and plotting evil,
- (6) All adultery, immorality, and sexual deviations as defined by the Scriptures,

GOD'S DECLARED DESIRES

"In response¹² to these problems the prophets offered four solutions. The first two relate to what man must do; the other two relate to what God will do.

First, the prophets exhorted the people to repent of their evil and turn back to God (Amos 5:4–6; Hos 6:1–3; Zeph 2:3; Jer 4:14).

Second, the prophets exhorted the people to exercise justice, righteousness, and loyalty. They challenged the citizens of their day to take positive steps to right the wrongs of society (Amos 5:24; Isa 1:16–17; Mic 6:8).

Third, the prophets, particularly Jeremiah and Ezekiel, looked to the establishment of the New Covenant, which will provide the spiritual power for people to walk in the manner required by God (Jer 31:31–34; Ezek 16:60–63; 36:25–28).

Fourth, the prophets anticipated the coming of the Messiah, who will establish justice and righteousness during His millennial reign (Isa 11:4; 42:1–4; Mic 4:2–4).

Some may object to setting forth the prophets as models for Christians in confronting social and moral issues. Admittedly the church is not Israel, and pastors are not biblical prophets.

¹¹ Malachi probably prophesied between the first and second governorships of Nehemiah (ca. 432-31 B.C.).

¹² Quoted from an article by **J. Carl Laney**, (1990). *Bibliotheca Sacra*, 147 (585), 35–43.

Yet what is modeled by the prophets is certainly underscored in the New Testament Epistles. It seems that the principles reflected in the prophets are not limited to a particular dispensation.

The prophets balanced spiritual concerns with physical problems, recognizing both man's part and God's part in the ultimate solution to each.

THE BALANCE OF CHRIST'S MINISTRY

This balance is reflected in the words of **Amy Carmichael**. Speaking in response to criticism of her humanitarian work in India, she said¹³,

“One cannot save and then pitchfork souls into heaven.... Souls are more or less securely fastened to bodies...and as you cannot get the souls out and deal with them separately, you have to take them both together.”

We live in a desensitized, cruel world. We need the power of the Spirit to stay tender, compassionate, and Christlike in our daily lives. One of the great works of the Spirit of God is to change our hearts and keep them changed into Christlikeness.

There is one thing you can always notice about Jesus in the pages of the New Testament: His deep concern for the poor, needy, troubled, oppressed, and hurting. His love and compassion stand out in every scene.

CHRIST'S MOST FREQUENT EMOTION

Never forget that Christ's most frequent emotion was not anger, or disappointment, or frustration.

Christ's most often expressed emotion is feeling for human needs.

Jesus is most characterized in His humanity by a love that shows itself in compassion.

Every time the verb “showing/having compassion” is used in the New Testament (which is 12x) it always refers to Jesus!

As we read the Gospels, what do they emphasize about what Christ did on earth? They show His great compassion upon weak and wandering humans.

This compassion¹⁴ is the most frequently recorded emotion of Jesus. Watch Him in:

Matthew 9:36 But when He saw the multitudes, **He was moved with compassion for them**, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd; (same event as Mk. 6:34)

Matthew 14:14 And when Jesus went out He saw a great multitude; and **He was moved with compassion for them**, and healed their sick;

¹³ Quoted by Ruth A. Tucker in *Guardians of the Great Commission* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), p. 134.

¹⁴ Though translated in English as “compassion” these two verses do not contain the Greek word *splangknoi*, but another word, the one for “mercy”: Matthew 18:33 (NKJV) Should you not **also have had compassion on your fellow servant**, just as I had pity on you?’ (this is the word *eleo* or “mercy”); Mark 5:19 (NKJV) However, Jesus did not permit him, but said to him, “Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and **how He has had compassion on you.**” (this is the word *eleo* or “mercy”)

Matthew 15:32 Now Jesus called His disciples to Himself and said, “**I have compassion on the multitude**, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat. And I do not want to send them away hungry, lest they faint on the way”; (same event as Mk. 8:2)

Matthew 18:27 (NKJV) Then the **master of that servant was moved with compassion**, released him, and forgave him the debt.

Matthew 20:34 So **Jesus had compassion and touched their eyes**. And immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed Him.

Mark 1:41 (NKJV) Then **Jesus, moved with compassion**, stretched out *His* hand and touched him, and said to him, “I am willing; be cleansed.”

Mark 6:34 (NKJV) And Jesus, when He came out, **saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them**, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things.

Mark 8:2 (NKJV) “**I have compassion on the multitude**, because they have now continued with Me three days and have nothing to eat.

Mark 9:22 (NKJV) And often he has thrown him both into the fire and into the water to destroy him. But if You can do anything, **have compassion on us and help us.**”

Luke 7:13 (NKJV) When the Lord saw her, **He had compassion on her** and said to her, “Do not weep.”

Luke 10:33 (NKJV) But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. **And when he saw him, he had compassion.**

Luke 15:20 (NKJV) “And he arose and came to his father. But when he was still a great way off, **his father saw him and had compassion**, and ran and fell on his neck and kissed him.

JESUS THE COMPASSIONATE ONE

Jesus was moved with compassion: For the confused. For the sick and suffering. For the weak. For the desperate. For the persistent. For the helpless. For the hopeless. For the bereaved. For the misfortunate. For the repentant.

DO WE HAVE HIS COMPASSION FOR OUR WORLD?

Jesus is watching us, and warning that choices we make can blind us to spiritual realities around us. In Laodicea, the final of the seven churches of Revelation 2-3, Jesus warned them that their longing for riches caused them to be blinded to their real spiritual condition and needs.

Riches piled up often reflect discontent; and a lack of contentment always has dangerous effects upon our spiritual life. Jesus says we need to ask Him to help us see what love of money

can do to us. One area of blindness that discontentment with wealth can produce is an insensitivity to the needs of the less fortunate around us. We often need to check how we are doing in having Christlike compassion for the poor.

To help us all wake up to the needs of the world, and to stir up Christlike compassion, join me in a look at the world as God sees it. One of the great tools to check our heart for those who are in great need is to pause and reflect on the World Population Clock.

It is a very moving sight to watch each second as the numbers changed. The math of this US Census Bureau site is simple:

The number goes up by 4.3 births and down by 1.8 deaths for a net gain of 2.5 new immortal souls on Earth—**each second!**

The United Nations estimates that we have about 7.245 billion souls alive at this moment¹⁵. That number is just about 100 million more living souls from last year this on this date! Of course, only our True and Living God knows exactly how many there really are, as well as the number of hairs on each of their heads!

But to get a bit of perspective as we sit here alive and relatively safe in Michigan, here in the struggling but prosperous American heartland—we need to reflect on the people who share life with us here on Earth.

For all of us alive in Michigan, despite our current economic woes, we are better off financially, economically, and comfortably than the vast majority of all the others alive today.

Which is just another way of saying:

HOW RICH WE ARE

For a moment, imagine with me that the whole world was represented in just this auditorium. That means, if we were to reduce that unimaginable number of our global population, which is just over 7 ¼ billion people. So if we made all those billions of souls distilled down to a representative group of people sitting in chairs, here is how it would look today.

Our world, shrunken down to a community of 1000 persons, sitting in this auditorium, would be a town in which:

1/7th or about 15% **of us** live high on a hill called the developed world – that would be the balcony. From our world today the people in the balcony would represent about one billion people who live in the USA, Western Europe, Japan, Taiwan, Australia and Korea.

6/7^{ths} or about 85% **of us** live on the rocky, often parched, usually crowded, dreadfully polluted bottomland called the rest of the world.

Wealth	GDP	Population	Pop totals	Region
26%	\$ 15.6	5%	307,553,450	USA

¹⁵ http://www.census.gov/popclock/?intcmp=home_pop

	Trillion			
23%	\$ 13.6 Trillion	7%	492,000,000	Europe
12%	\$ 7.5 Trillion	3%	221,000,000	SE Asia (Japan, Taiwan, Korea, Australia)
39%	\$ 23.4 Trillion	85%	6,190,000,000	China, India & the Rest of World

THE RICH AND THE NOT RICH

We, the fortunate 15% or 1/7th or the 150 out of us in this auditorium on the hill, hold over 60% of the wealth of the whole town,

We balcony dwellers also own over 50% all the homes in town; and each of us have an average of two rooms per person in our homes.

We balcony dwellers also own 85 percent of all the automobiles,

We balcony dwellers own about 80 percent of all the TV sets,

We balcony dwellers own almost 80 percent of all the telephones,

And we balcony dwellers make an average income of over \$ 35,000 per person per year.

The not-so-fortunate 850 people on the bottom, in the less developed world (when the super-rich who have business dealings with the developed nations are factored out of their region) have learned to survive on 1/50th of our incomes. Most of the other people on Earth survive on roughly \$700 per person per year. That means \$2 per day is what they live on.

But even among the poor there are more-poor and less-poor.

Of the poor, the vast majority live on less than \$300 per year (\$1 a day), and are living with 5 other people in their room, and all of them will probably never live to see 50 candles on their birthday cake (if they had ever seen a birthday cake)!

Veteran Missionary to India and noted author Dr. Paul Brandt once asked,

“I wonder how the villagers on the crowded bottomland (a third of whose people are suffering from malnutrition) feel about us folks up there on the hill?”

This takes us right back to Christ's words to His church and brings up:

THE QUESTION OF COMPASSION

What was Christ's most frequent emotion? Compassion, right? He was moved with compassion. When we aren't compassionate Jesus points out that there is usually one cause: *we are rich and increased with goods, feeling we need nothing, and are not sacrificing for others.*

Now turn back to the almost last book of God's Word, to 1 John.

Please stand, and follow along as we listen to Christ's words in:

1 John 3.14-18 (NKJV) We know that we have passed from death to life, **because we love the brethren**. He who does not love his brother abides in death. 15 Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. 16 By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. 17 **But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?** 18 My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.

ARE WE LIVING WITH CHRIST-LIKE COMPASSION?

Christ-like compassion for our fellow humans on Earth frees us to invest in Heaven instead of laying up our treasures on earth.

Christ-like compassion helps us see that our life span and our resources were all given us by **Another**, who owns us, and wants a return on His investment.

Christ-like compassion comes as we surrender all we have and are to Jesus.

That is the fast God desired in Isaiah 58.

Hymn # 366 "I Surrender All"