

# A Revolution of Compassion

Dear Friend,

In the movie, *Pay It Forward*, a young boy by the name of Trevor, starts a revolution of compassion as a project for his social studies class. The project involved doing a favor that really helps someone and telling him or her not to pay it back, but to pay it forward to three other people who in turn, each pay it forward to three more. This continues on and on until a global outpouring of compassion takes place.

Does all this sound impossible or idealistic? Well it has already happened. The Scripture tells us “that we love Him because He first loved us.” Because of the love Jesus Christ demonstrated through His death and resurrection we as believers have become a part of His revolution of compassion. Jesus has paid it forward with the promise of an eternity with God. Now we have been liberated to let His compassion flow through each of us. 2 Cor. 5:15 says, “And He died for all, so that all those who live might live no longer to and for themselves, but to and for Him who died and was raised again for their sake.”

We have been freed from the burden of sin and selfishness because of God’s love and mercy demonstrated through Jesus Christ. It is this love of God which is the secret weapon used in the revolution of compassion. As Romans 5:5 declares, “God has poured out His love into our hearts.” This love of God is the deepest, strongest force in the universe. As Ps 62:11-12 says, “One thing God has spoken, two things have I heard: that you, O God, are strong, and that you, O Lord are loving.” We see the strength and love of God in all of creation. As revolutionaries of compassion we are dedicated to preserving this creation. As Psalm 24:1 says, “The earth is the Lord, and everything in it, the world and all who live in it.

It is the power and love of God working through us that causes the revolution of compassion to burst forth. This revolution of compassion in turn brings forth the change for good that the earth is thirsting for. It is not a revolution of theory or word but direct action that results in helping those in need

I have experienced years of working with the homeless and low income, hurting people. Certainly there have been times when it would have been easy to give up. Yet Jesus doesn’t give up on me, so I can’t give up on them, God’s creation. He promises he will never leave nor forsake us yet working with those

who are hurting and in pain is not always an easy walk. It forces me to deal with my uncertainties, fears, disappointments and expectations as I try to help those in need. In the midst of the revolution of compassion we are reminded, "Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed. For His compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness" (Lam. 3:12-24).

As followers of the world greatest revolutionary, Jesus Christ who challenges us to be a part of the revolution of compassion we must ask why is it so easy for the multitudes to accept the fact that each night thousands of women, children, and men are homeless in the richest country in the world? What spell immobilizes and paralyzes us when it comes to decisive action in behalf of the poor? How can so many claim to follow the world's greatest revolutionary, Jesus Christ, and then ignore His Words when He say, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these, you did for Me"(Matt.25:40)? To those who consider themselves religious, yet allow justice to be denied, as politicians ignore the Stewart B. McKinney Homeless Assistance Act's provision of federal surplus property being used for the homeless, Amos would declare, "I can't stand your religious meetings. I'm fed up with your conferences and conventions. I want nothing to do with your religious projects, your pretentious slogans and goals. I'm sick of your fund-raising schemes, your public relations and image making. I've had all I can take of your noisy ego-music. When was the last time you sang to Me? Do you know what I want? I want justice--oceans of it. I want fairness--rivers of it. That's what I want. That's all I want" (Amos 5:21-24, The Message Bible). As the Word of God is ignored, or at best implemented as theory, but rarely put into practice, the denial of basic justice for the poor is considered normal. Developers, in the name of economic development can rob the needy of their homes, monopolistic utility companies can shut off their heat in the middle of winter, and yet the religious remain silent--even though Amos 5:24 declares, "let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream." The time for a revolution of compassion and justice is now.

The hour is late and God is warning us, "Woe to you who are complacent... and to you who feel secure."(Amos 6:1) We must begin to seek the Lord with all our heart, finding our security in Him. No longer can we afford to be indifferent to the plight of the poor, the fatherless, the homeless and the hurting. We must arise now and let the revolution of compassion begin with us. There is so much preaching today, but how much of it is based upon the scriptures and its cry for justice? Jesus Christ is Risen and His resurrection should affect every dimension of our lives. Experiencing Christ means letting Him tear down the barriers in our

lives, which separate us from one another. His love frees us from the dominance of selfish, self-centered living in our lives.

In a world that is saturated with so much bad news, we all need some good news. Listen to the good news that Jesus brings as He sums up His mission on earth. “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 favor.”(Luke 4:18-19)

Jesus’ proclamation of a revolution of compassion involving good news to the poor is backed up by over 500 verses in the Bible concerning wealth and poverty. In Luke, one out of every seven verses, and in James, one out of every five verses, relate to this subject. In spite of the fact that Jesus talked more about poverty and wealth than any other subject, it is still not stressed in most pulpits on a regular basis. Instead, the gospel message is frequently exchanged for the popular cultural emphasis that money is a sign of success. That’s bad news for the poor, particularly when it is made to sound like money is a sign of God’s blessing. The Pharisees, like many today, felt this way and looked down on Jesus for His poverty. (Luke 16:14) Jesus rejects this bad theology and brings good news to the poor declaring, “Blessed are you who are poor for yours is the Kingdom of God.”(Luke 6:20) In Luke 16:13 He declares, “No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money,”

A love for money and the greed it breeds is often one of the greatest enemies of the compassionate revolutionary. “People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men (and women also) into ruin and destruction.”(1 Tim 6:9) Jim Wallis in his book, The Call to Conversion, states, “The result of prosperity based on injustice is anxiety. Gloom, cynicism, despair, and hedonism are all fruits of the fundamental anxiety that characterizes the cultures of the wealthy nations. The spiritual crisis of the rich countries directly corresponds to the economic crisis of the poor countries. The rich hunger in spirit while the poor hunger for bread. Our spiritual malaise is the consequence of affluence in the face of deprivation. Conversion in our time is to liberate the poor and to make the blind see. The poor need justice, and the rich need restored sight.”

The good news is, “The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned. From

that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.”(Matt.4:16, 17) To repent means to turn around and not keep engaging in the same self-destructive behavior. Living in the Kingdom of heaven, also called the Kingdom of God, involves living a life of faith freed from being possessed by our possessions. Dom Hilder Camara stated, “I used to think when I was a child, that Christ might have been exaggerating when He warned about the dangers of wealth. Today I know better. I know how very hard it is to be rich and still keep the milk of human kindness. Money has a dangerous way of putting scales on one’s eyes, a dangerous way of freezing people’s hands, eyes, lips and hearts.” When that happens as God blesses us, instead of being good news to the poor, we become bad news.

Jesus’ proclamation of Luke 4:18, 19 was not just a proclamation of good news but an actual declaration of a revolution of compassion shared in good deeds among lepers, despised women and other marginalized people. He healed the sick, fed the hungry and cast out demons from the possessed. Jesus completely identified with the poor and homeless to the extent that in Matt.25:34-40, “Come you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the Kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you give Me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you took Me in, 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. Then the righteous will answer Him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ The King will reply, ‘I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers (and sisters) of mine, you did for Me.’”

At times it seems so hard serving God and being a part of His revolution of compassion. But the alternative of living only for yourself is deadly. As we read I Samuel 1-15 we see how it destroyed Eli and his sons as well as King Saul. In Isaiah 1-22 we see God’s judgment pronounced on the nation of Israel and other nations as they refused to serve the Living God and misused the poor and needy. In Mark 1-8 we read over and over how Jesus, filled with compassion, healed the sick, fed the hungry, and reached out to those in need. Yes, Jesus’ life was one of serving, sacrificing and saving and now He is calling us to follow Him and be a part of the dynamic work He is doing at this time.

The question is what will be our response to Jesus invitation to follow Him and be a part of His revolution of compassion. Will we accept the invitation He is

giving us or will we continue to complain and think someone should do something about this world out of control? If we continue to wait on the government or someone else to respond we will certainly be disappointed. The fact is we all have a God given purpose in this life. In order to experience it we must learn to live life differently than the self-centered way we used to. That is why 2 Cor. 5:17 says, "If anyone be in Christ they are a new creation. The old has passed away, the new has come." We must admit we are part of the problem and then let Christ change us. As this happens we will learn to live for others discovering the secret that what we give away will come back to us many times over. As Luke 6:38 says, "Give away your life; you'll find life given back, but not merely given back, but given back with bonus and blessings. Giving, not getting, is the way. Generosity begets generosity."

Giving away the love of God is one of the greatest privileges given to humanity. That's why Isaiah declared, "The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners" (*Isaiah 61:1*). That proclamation was directly fulfilled when Jesus came into this world (*Matt. 11:5*). Now you and I have been sent forth to share the love and hope Jesus provides through His death and resurrection (*Matt. 28:19, 20*). We have an opportunity to do this as we feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, provide clothing and visit the sick and imprisoned (*Matt. 25:31-46*.) We have been sent forth to be instruments of hope and help now by also sharing the message of salvation through Jesus Christ. In order to do this we must help people to see their need for a Savior and how Scripture makes it absolutely clear that Jesus Christ is that Savior. Sharing God's love involves reaching out to people in their time of need like Jesus did to the woman at the well in John 4. Such reaching out includes sharing the fact that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (*Roman 3:23*). Unless one recognizes that they have sinned and repent of those sins and turn to Jesus who paid the price for sin through His death and resurrection, they will die in their sins and go to hell. That's why *Romans 6:23* says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Being a compassionate revolutionary is being one who the Holy Spirit is working through to share the love of God.

There is no greater love than that which God has given. "You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (*Romans 5:6-8*). Now it is important that as

we share this message of the love of God with others in both word and deed we help them under the direction of the Holy Spirit to believe and confess that Jesus is Lord. “If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved” (*Romans 10:9, 10*). This is the holistic ministry that God is calling us to. A revolution of compassion that cares about the whole person involving their physical, mental and spiritual needs. Now that we have been freed to serve let us go forth as revolutionaries of compassion sharing in word and deed the love of God.

In Christ’s service,

Larry Rice