

A Heart of Compassion
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Well, there are no sermon notes for this evening. It's kind of a special weekend, as you'll see. Much of the message for this evening is gonna be in video form. But if you have your Bibles with you, you will find sermon notes in Matthew chapter 25, and so you can turn there and we'll be looking at that. The actual title of the message tonight is, "A Heart of Compassion."

I shared with you some time ago about the day that Deedee and I received an embossed invitation from the King of Tonga to join him and his wife for a very formal dinner. I'll tell you, it's not every day that I receive an invitation to have dinner with a king. And I learned a lot about the King of Tonga during that time. I learned that he is the last remaining absolute monarch in the entire world. The King of Tonga actually owns all of Tonga and everything in it. All of the Tongans are subject to his rule and his word is the only authority in the land. It's very bizarre to be in the presence of an absolute monarch.

When he came to our church for worship, the first thing that happened was the Secret Service showed up and told us all of the rules, which included that we had to get everybody in the church and sitting down. Can you imagine if we tried that here? It would take 50 minutes to get everybody into the building and sitting down. We had to all be sitting down. And then when the Secret Service had secured all the doors, they would bring the king and queen in as they played the *Tongan National Anthem*. And they were escorted to a special platform with Secret Service agents around them. And then we could conduct the service.

When we went to the dinner we had to learn about proper protocol, everything from how to



dress to how to stand to rules like never turning our back on the king. Anyone who went before him to speak could walk forward in front of him, but then would have to walk backwards out the door until they were completely out of his sight.

One of the more bizarre things was that all of the women who served him his meal and served him at the table — who were all Tongan women — literally were required to crawl on their hands and knees up to his table and then serve him from a kneeling position. I've got to tell you, I'm just not accustomed to being around things like this.

But, you know, it's an interesting contrast, to contrast the way we responded to an earthly king who was an absolute monarch — and an absolutely large man, by the way. The man weighs well over 350 pounds. He's a very, very large king. He's in the *Guinness Book of World Records* as the largest monarch ever to reign because at one point in his life I think he weighed over 600 pounds. But it was interesting to watch how we related to him and compare that to the life of Jesus on earth.

You see, we've been talking over the last few weeks about reactions to the *Passion of the Christ*, and one of the questions that I've heard from a lot of people who don't go to church is, if Jesus was indeed the King of kings, if Jesus was indeed the Son of God, then why would He have lived the way He lived on this earth? Why would He have been found among people from nowhere, with nothing — you know, it wasn't just that the disciples were afraid to stand up for Jesus when He was grabbed by the Romans — although they were — but the truth is, even if they had desired to stand up for Jesus, there was nothing they could have done. The entire cadre of people that cared anything at all about Jesus wouldn't have even been able to go up against one company of Roman soldiers.

At the time of His death, Jesus had nothing, no resources. Mary and Joseph were a poor family from the middle of nowhere. The people He ran around with were common people, at best, and often were outcasts, even criminals, the ... [inaudible] of society. And people say, "It just

doesn't add up." If this is a King, He certainly doesn't look like any king that we've ever seen.

You know, a part of that question, why would Jesus come to earth? And if He's a King, if He's lived eternally in heaven with God the Father, why would He come to earth and then hang out with the lowest of the low? A part of that question comes from our own arrogance because we think, of course, He would have been honored to be in the presence of our kings and of our highfalutin people. Why wouldn't He have gone to Caesar or to one of the high courts around the world and hobnobbed with the elite?

Have you ever thought about where Jesus came from? I mean, according to the Scripture, from the foundations of the earth Jesus was present with God. "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, for the word was God, and all things were made by him. Without him was not anything made that was made" [John 1:1-3]. And the "word," the Scripture says, became flesh and dwelt among us. In other words, this Jesus, who had been present from the foundations of the earth, now leaves the security of heaven, and the Scriptures says, literally empties Himself and pours Himself out and takes the form of a servant on earth.

We need to be real careful to get this part. Jesus was slumming just by coming to earth. He would have been equally slumming if He'd been hanging out with Caesar Augustus in Rome. Compared to the heaven that Jesus left behind, it was all slums. Jesus was coming to show us a different way of royalty. Jesus was coming to show us a heart filled with compassion. He came because of His great compassion. The Scripture says that He voluntarily, instead of clinging to the things of God and clinging to heaven, Philippians says, He counted equality with God not something to be clung to or something to be grasped, but instead, He voluntarily emptied Himself, poured Himself out, and took the form of a servant.

It's because of that, the apostle Paul says, in Philippians chapter 2, "Therefore, if there's any encouragement in Christ, if there's any consolation of love, if there's any fellowship of the spirit, if there's any affection or any compassion" – he's gonna go on and say — "have this same

mind in you that was also in Christ Jesus.” But what he’s saying is when you see these things in Jesus Christ; you ought to begin to see them in your own life.

Jesus came along to show us a heart of compassion, a heart that was constantly identifying with the least and the last and the lost of our world. And as He showed that heart of compassion, He consistently said, “Follow Me. ... Follow Me,” because the way to the throne of God, the way to glory, as Jesus showed us, is the way of compassion.

You know, in one of the most remarkable texts in Scripture, in Matthew chapter 25, beginning at verse 31, we have the passage that’s commonly called “the sheep and the goats.” It’s one of the few places in Scripture where Jesus actually speaks in direct terms about a judgment scene. And the Scripture says, “When the Son of Man comes in his glory and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on his throne in glory.” Jesus is coming back in glory. And on that day, the King of Tonga will be down on his knees, along with everybody else. There will not be any kind of regal celebration that has ever come close to that day when Jesus comes in all His glory with all of His holy angels with Him. It will be one magnificent celebration. But Jesus went to that celebration through the cross. He went to that celebration in humility because of His compassion.

“When the Son of Man comes in glory and all the holy angels with him, then will he sit on his throne of glory, and all the nations will be gathered before him; and he will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. And he will set the sheep on his right hand and the goats on the left. And then the king will say to those on his right hand, ‘Come, you blessed of the Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and you gave me food; I was thirsty, and you gave me drink; I was a stranger, and you took me in; I was naked, and you clothed me; I was sick, and you visited me; I was in prison, and you came to me’” [verses 31-36]. Jesus is saying the sheep will come, because when He looks at them, He’s gonna recognize the compassion in their hearts is the same compassion that’s filled in His heart, and He’s gonna know, “These are My sheep.” And He will draw them to Him

because of a heart of compassion. Jesus is saying to us that when the end comes, we need to have hearts filled with the same kind of compassion He had.

But have you ever really thought about this story, about sheep and the goats? Later on He's gonna look at the goats, the ones on His left, and say, "Depart from Me, you cursed ones, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels because you didn't show hearts of compassion. You don't belong to Me."

You know, it was not uncommon for shepherds at all during those days to have sheep and goats within their flock. The shepherds primarily were concerned with the sheep. The sheep were much, much more valuable to the shepherd than the goats. They were just more valuable animals. They produced more. They were worth more in the marketplace. But shepherds would tolerate goats within the flock.

The goats in the flock are always kind of interesting, because the sheep will go where the shepherd takes them and the sheep will feed on whatever the shepherd directs them to. The sheep tend to stay away from whatever the shepherd doesn't direct them to. The goats will go along with the flock, and the goats will also eat whatever the shepherd directs them to. The problem with goats is that they're indiscriminate feeders. They'll eat what the shepherd points them to, but they'll eat everything else, too. But they're still allowed to mingle around in the flock there. The sheep kind of go along, happy to just be in the flock, kind of all at the same level.

But you watch: if you've ever seen sheep and goats in a field together, the goat will look for the highest place. The goat wants to get up above everybody. If there's a little ridge in a field, you'll find a goat standing up on the field looking around at all the sheep, you know, "Look at me, I'm up here above everybody." Sheep don't tend to have a whole lot of problems with each other. Sheep just kind of go along and get along and everybody's happy.

And when it's cold out, they'll snuggle up together and get warm. Goats have a tendency to kind of butt each other and create problems. But the shepherd will tolerate the sheep ... the goats

among the sheep.

But, you know, in Palestine where Jesus was living, the last task at the end of the day of any good shepherd is to separate the sheep from the goats because the sheep, by virtue of the way they've been created, are prepared for the night. They'll huddle together, and the warmth of their fur ... of their wool and the warmth of their company together will enable them to successfully stay through the night. They don't have a tendency to wander off.

A single shepherd can generally keep the whole flock together in the field, and they do fine in the night. But the goats — when night comes, when the temperature drops — the goats have to be separated from the herd and taken away because they can't handle the night. Their skin won't take it; they won't stay together; they have a tendency to wander off — they're a mess.

Jesus knew all of this, and Jesus knew that the people that He was talking to knew all of this. So when He tells the story of the sheep and the goats and the separation, He knows they're all gonna get it, and He knows they're all gonna understand that God is separating the good ones from the bad ones, that God is separating the ones that have fed on what He wanted them to feed on from the indiscriminate feeders that have fed on all kinds of things, that He's separating the ones who have been a part of the community from the ones who wanted to just butt heads and rise up over everybody and be generally obnoxious. that He's celebrating the ones who are prepared to stand with Him from the ones who can't take the night.

But here's the thing I wonder if you've ever considered. Did the sheep or the goats have any choice about what they were? Did the goat ever wake up one morning and say, you know, "Today's the day, I'm gonna be a goat instead of a sheep"? Did the sheep just decide one day, you know, "I think I'm gonna become a sheep"? The sheep grew up to be exactly what God created them to be, and the goats grew up to be exactly what God had created them to be. And now it comes to the end of the day, and God says, "Hey, I'm gonna separate them. And the sheep, because they're sheep, they get to stay here, and the goats because they're here, they get to go here."

This is really important because sometimes we can look at this story of Jesus and we can get the idea that what Jesus is saying in this story is what you need to do is go out and do good works, because if you do good works, when Jesus comes He's gonna see your good works and He's gonna say, "Good, you've earned your way into heaven. You're a sheep."

But could I suggest to you that the balance of Scripture tends to suggest that most of us begin our lives as goats. In fact, I would suggest to you that the Scripture says that apart from Jesus, all of us begin our lives as goats. I mean, aren't we the ones that want to rise up above the rest and butt heads and that need to be watched all the time and we will feed on the wrong things? You see, in the figurative sense, the Lord tolerates goats in the flock because the Lord knows that under the right circumstances, the Lord can transform a goat into a sheep. It's what we call being "born again." You see, the sheep are the sheep, not because they've made all the right choices. The sheep are the sheep only because they've made the choice to follow the voice of the Good Shepherd. The distinguishing characteristic, however, that Jesus sees between the sheep and the goats, the way He says that the Son will know how to tell the difference is based on their compassion. When Jesus comes, He finds a heart of compassion in some, and He says, "These are My sheep." If He doesn't find it in others, "These are My goats."

Now I want to ask you this evening, is there any way that we can be transformed into people with a heart of compassion? Is there any way that we can be transformed into those that Jesus will look at and say, "yes, you go on My right, you're My people"?

Well, I would say that, figuratively speaking, there's some things we would have to do. Since only Jesus can transform us, the first thing we would have to do is meet Jesus. You really have no hope of beginning to have the heart that Jesus has until you first have a relationship with Jesus. The good news is He wants to have a relationship with you. He's searching for you. He's been searching for you from the very beginning. He's gonna continue to search for you. He'll do everything that He can to find you. But, you know, it helps if we're looking for Him as well.

You see, the one thing that Jesus will never do, He'll never make you enter into a relationship with Him. Jesus will never force a relationship on you. He'll never just automatically turn you into one of His sheep. In fact, what He says is, "My sheep know My voice." Well, are you listening for His voice? Are you looking for Jesus? Because oddly enough, when Jesus was on earth, walking among us as a human being, He was always found among the least and the last and the lost. And oddly enough, according to the Scripture, that's still where He's found today.

In fact, Jesus says the oddest thing in this text. When He told the sheep, "Hey, I was hungry, and you gave Me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me something to drink; I was sick, and you came to see Me; I was in prison, and you visited Me; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; I was naked, and you clothed Me," you know what they say? "Wow, I don't remember that. I kind of think I'd have a memory of that, Jesus. I mean, when were You hungry and I fed You? When were You thirsty and I gave You drink? When did I see You as a stranger and take You in or naked and clothed You? Or when did I see You sick or imprisoned and come to You?" And the King will answer them and say to them, "Assuredly, I say to you, as much as you did it to one of the least of these, my brothers, you did it unto me" [verse 40].

Did you know that you can encounter Jesus in reaching out to the least and the last and the lost in this world? That's a phenomenal thing, a somewhat radical thing that Jesus says. Matthew 9:36 [NASB] — you'll remember this story. The disciples come around the lake trying to get away, and they saw all the people, and Jesus looked at them, and it says, "Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd." And Jesus is still seeing the people and still having compassion on them, because the world is filled with people who are like sheep without a shepherd. And Jesus says, when we serve them, we're serving Him and encountering Him.

It was about 20 years ago that I discovered an organization called Compassion International. It's a child sponsorship organization. It's one of the finest in the world. Many of you are familiar

with all kinds of sponsorship organizations. Sadly, you need to know the reality, that most of them are, at best, not very good organizations and, in many cases, are scam organizations. But there are a couple that are excellent. And among them, consistently the highest rated of all of them, is Compassion International. In fact, one organization, a national organization connected with Forbes that does independent analysis of charitable organizations, not only rates Compassion International as the number one child assistance organization in the world, but also rates it on the top five list of all charitable organizations of all kinds, secular, sacred, all kinds, as one of the most trustworthy and vital organizations.

I've been sponsoring kids for a little bit over 20 years now, and I've had a chance to visit them in all different kinds of places in the world, and I've had a chance to see the impact that sponsorship makes on these kids' lives. I know that it's real, what they do. But, you know, the most amazing thing about the whole sponsorship experience for me has been to sponsor these children in a tangible way — has, in so many ways, over the last 20 years helped me have deeper encounters with Jesus Christ. I'll share some of that with you in just a moment, but first I want you to watch a fairly lengthy video that explains a little bit about what Compassion does and tells a story of how two worlds can intersect and everyone's lives can be changed. So let's watch this video.

NARRATOR: What will 20 American high school kids find here? We've come to see what Compassion International is doing with poor children. What will we see here? What will we feel? What will we do about it?

FEMALE: It's kind of just really hit me recently, you know, I'm actually going to Ecuador.

NARRATOR: One week to go, and the last meeting before the trip.

FEMALE: I'm really excited. I'm probably more excited about this than I've really ever been [about] anything in my life.

MALE: I'm afraid of going into a whole new kind of country, different people.

FEMALE: I'm scared of the culture shock that I'm gonna have.

MALE: I don't understand poverty, living where I do.

FEMALE: My selfish ways, I don't want to have to change.

FEMALE: And that I know I'm gonna come home with my heart broken.

NARRATOR: Denver to Dallas-Fort Worth, Dallas-Fort Worth to Miami, Miami to Guayaquil, Ecuador.

MALE: The way I feel right now, it's just ... I wish it would turn back so I wouldn't have to see what I have to see, what I have to see first. I mean, you can always turn off a Compassion International video and say, "OK." The kicker here is I'm gonna be there firsthand. I can't turn off their life.

NARRATOR: Ten p.m. It's still 90 degrees or more. The humidity is about 115 percent. Everything is done in Spanish. There are guys with guns. Most of the luggage made it. The Grand Hotel, Guayaquil; it's air-conditioned. We weren't sure what to expect. Morning in ... [inaudible]. Nothing prepared us for this.

MALE: It smells worse than ... [inaudible].

NARRATOR: Mud everywhere.

MALE: I keep waiting to see, you know, where's a nice part of town?

NARRATOR: There's no sewage system. It all goes into the muck. During the rainy season, the river rises and everything floats in the currents.

MALE: I've never seen this kind of poverty in my life.

NARRATOR: Our first Compassion project is a pleasant contrast, a ... [inaudible] of kids come into school on Saturday, just to meet us. School is crowded and noisy, but these guys are lucky to be here, and they know it. Sponsored kids stay in school instead of going to work when they're 9 or 10.

MALE: The kids that I talked to really relied so much on the faith that their sponsor had,

the faith that they have, and I thought that was just incredible ... you could feel that.

NARRATOR: Some of us decided to sponsor a child through Compassion before we left the States. Today, Michael, Cory, Kirsten and Doug and Casey meet the children they sponsor.

MALE: I was really excited to meet them, but I was also scared because I didn't know what it would be like. When we got inside it was pretty cool because I gave him the gifts I got him, and he liked those.

MALE: How has Compassion helped your family? (*Asking question through an interpreter.*)

INTERPRETER: Really, I don't know how to say how much the help of Compassion is. One of the things that amazes me is how good the Lord has been to us as a family. I'm really amazed that a young person like yourself would want to sponsor my son. And, to be honest with you, we were not going to be able to send him to school because we just didn't have the finances. As little as it costs, we didn't have that kind of money.

NARRATOR: We were invited to Kirsten's family's home.

FEMALE: [Inaudible] ...and I were put in another room, and I was just kind of sitting there bored. I got out my markers and my paper, and I started to draw pictures, and he wrote next to them what they were in Spanish. And he wrote his name for me. And so then he started to do it, and I would write down what things were in English for him.

NARRATOR: Six people live here. My room at home is about this size. If you look closely, poor people really are people.

MALE: Sometimes it doesn't feel like it's really real, sometimes because it's just so different from anything I've ever seen before. And it's kind of like a ... [inaudible].

NARRATOR: It's almost dinnertime before most of us realized we missed lunch.

FEMALE: Scott gave his gum wrapper to this little boy, and he just used it like a toy, like a top or a dice. And he was just so content with a gum wrapper, where I need, you know, a

radio or a car or a game or cards or something just to make me content. A gum wrapper won't make me content.

MALE: It's incredible how small they are. An 18 year old there looked like he was 13 to me.

MALE: Hurt. Hurt is one of the things I feel, and confusion is another thing.

NARRATOR: Sunday morning at a Compassion-sponsored orphanage. The kids are nice enough to give us a soccer clinic.

MALE: It was funny to watch them, when we kept saying, Ecuadorians 3, North Americanos 0, and Ecuadorians 4, 5, 6, and Americans 0.

NARRATOR: Some have no living parents, others were deserted. These kids have nowhere to go. A boy tells us he saw his pregnant mother kicked in the stomach by his father. She lost the baby and eventually her life. He found love and acceptance here and eventually a new life in Jesus Christ. Good news; but his life still seems sad to us. Up to our ankles in mud; a youth group, a bus; and mud, even in Ecuador.

MALE: To make a long story short, Mom, Al Unser just ran Mario Andretti off the road.

MALE: If we all hang on to the sides right here and bounce back and forth, up and over ... this is not good.

NARRATOR: Quito, beautiful; this is an impressive school. Some of the students are Compassion kids; others can afford to go anywhere they want, they chose here. We're learning that Compassion has some pretty exceptional partners. Tomorrow we go to the jungle.

MALE: Right now we are two hours to the city, 40 minutes to the river, and then an hour, hour and 15 minutes up river to the place we're staying in the jungle.

MALE: Well, we have run into a little bit of a problem, namely, that the only bridge to the jungle is being resurfaced today. We're gonna unload all our luggage and carry it across the bridge where we're renting another bus to take us to the jungle.

MALE: This is high ... [inaudible]; flexibility is the key.

MALE: Every single person in the village practically came up to every single one of us and said, “Buenos Dias.”

NARRATOR: This morning, Mark, Tim, Scott and Shelly meet their Compassion children.

MALE: I got to speak to a ... [inaudible] man about his family and about how he farmed and just about his kid. They gave me so much gratitude. They were really, really grateful. It was really wonderful.

FEMALE: Sponsoring makes a big difference, because they have what they need to live a more healthy life, and the kids seem a lot happier when they’re sponsored. I had a lot of kids ask me if I’d be their sponsor, because it means that much to them. The kids who did have them showed me pictures. They went home and got pictures of them. I mean, a sponsor just means so much to the kids.

MALE: I really did not expect this to be as emotional as it is. I didn’t expect my sponsored child to really get deep inside my heart. You can’t come in here with a hard heart and expect to keep it hard.

NARRATOR: The odds are better today: [Inaudible] ... Ecuadorians 9, Americans. ...

MALE: How come we still can’t win at this game?

NARRATOR: Back across the Andes, shopping at the ... [inaudible] market. We have no idea, but today might be the whole reason for this trip. Smile to smile with yet another Ecuadorian culture. Jeremy, Sarah, Michael and Dan and Nancy meet their Compassion kids.

MALE: “Helberto” with an “H,” [inaudible] ... trucks and marbles. I was really nervous about meeting him before. But now that he’s been with me for a couple of minutes, it’s been really easy to talk to him.

NARRATOR: Lunch is a local delicacy called “cuy.” Here’s “cuy” in the kitchen, “cuy” on

the barbie, “cuy” with potatoes and beans, and “cuy” from plate to palate.

MALE: It looks good; [inaudible] ... looking at it, though.

NARRATOR: This is “cuy” on ... [inaudible]. It’s good we didn’t see it this way before lunch.

MALE: You take one of these. ...

NARRATOR: These people are friendly and quick to laugh. It’s hard to remember they’re poor; then reality hits. After lunch we visit homes. Not 50 yards from the school, we meet Enrique.

MALE: We’re looking at this lady and ... she was kind of unprepared with her house. She said, “Well, I have, you know, four kids, and I have a husband, but he died six months ago.” We were, like, you know, where’s the other kid? And there was this kid under a blanket.

MALE: She said he’s been throwing up a lot, a lot of blood, and he hasn’t eaten anything for three weeks.

MALE: We asked her how much it would cost to go to the doctor, and she said 15,000 sucres — 15,000 sucres in American dollars is around \$10.

MALE: It really opened my eyes to some things I really thought I felt about, and I really don’t feel ... think about that. I don’t feel for.

NARRATOR: Melanie will sponsor Enrique on the spot. We’re turned away from the clinic; he’s too sick. They can do nothing. They send us to the hospital in [inaudible]. We end the day not knowing.

MALE: I’ve never seen anybody, even in the worst part of any city I’ve ever been to, anybody who was ever that sick or that poor. I mean \$10 to go to the hospital, and they couldn’t afford it. It just blew me away.

FEMALE: I wish every one of you were there to see what I saw, to feel his ribs sticking out of his body.

MALE: You know, I heard about it and I really didn’t feel a whole lot. And I feel really bad.

But, you know, I probably feel more bad because I didn't feel anything.

FEMALE: I guess I'm really frustrated, just because I don't know what it's gonna take for me to change my life in a more positive way. I don't know what it is that's just gonna break my heart, I guess. I'm just really frustrated with myself.

MALE: And hopefully, God is gonna take this and change us into something really positive. I feel that now.

FEMALE: I saw my father's heart break, and mine did along with it.

MALE: We just got back from the hospital, and after all the tests, blood tests and ... well, the blood test was awful because he only weighed 50 pounds, a 10-year-old little boy and he only weighed 50 pounds, just all bones — chronic malnutrition. He was just dying of starvation; and the doctor said if he didn't come in he would have died.

NARRATOR: There is a Compassion button that says, "40,000 a day." That's the round number of children who die every day from preventable causes. Today, Melanie is wearing a button that's been edited to read, "39,999 a day." Enrique will spend a month in the hospital, but he will live.

MALE: I thought that American boys never cry, but this afternoon I felt ... a special touch. And I think that was the whole experience.

NARRATOR: We have no question that sponsorship makes a difference for kids. It wasn't until we met Enrique that we saw that sponsorship can be a life-and-death matter. Compassion doesn't often save a kid's life like that, but every day around the world, with very little drama, Compassion saves kids' lives, simply by giving them a chance, a chance to stay in school, a chance to discover their gifts and develop their talents, a chance to wear decent clothes and get medical care when they're sick, a chance to understand more about the goodness of God and learn about the things that could end the cycle of poverty in their families.

FEMALE: One thing I think I've learned is how much difference I can make in sponsoring a child, because I came and ... you know, I thought it was nice and everything, but I didn't realize how much it really could make a difference.

MALE: Just letting them grow up is such a gift you could give them.

MALE: A sponsored kid is walking around with a big smile on their face. They have the picture of you, and they're proud of that. It makes me want to sponsor more than one kid.

MALE: Child sponsorship makes sense to me because as an "almost adult," I'm given an opportunity to be able to support someone with so little. It takes a little, but you do so much.

MALE: I have learned a lot. And today I did sponsor a child.

FEMALE: The last thing I want to do is give up that sponsorship.

[Max Wilkins speaking again:] You know, for years, Matthew 25 troubled me, but it troubled me for the wrong reasons, because I thought it meant that I had to be out doing stuff for the poor, the dispossessed, the downtrodden in order to earn God's love. I couldn't be further from the truth. In fact, the truth is that when Jesus says, "Come, blessed of the Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world," if you read that in the Greek, you would understand that Jesus is literally saying, "Come, you who are already blessed by the Father, inherit the kingdom." The miracle had already taken place somewhere in their lives when Jesus transformed them into children of God. The compassion that they are living is because they've got hearts that are tuned in with the things of God.

I watched that kid in the movie. Early on he said, "You know, poor people, if you look at them real close, are really people." Well, that's rough. By the end of it he was saying, "You know, this gets in your heart." Even the hardest of hearts can be softened and touched by an experience like this. I think that's why Jesus says, sometimes, "If you want to find Me, move outside of your comfort zone a little bit." Find your way into those, the least and the last and the lost, and in the

encounter, you may not only change their lives, you may find yours changed as well.

You know, only Jesus can transform our lives to have a heart of compassion. We have to meet Jesus. But Jesus says, “One of the best places to soften your heart for an encounter with Me is out among those who are hungry and thirsty, alone, strangers, imprisoned, sick.” But then once we’ve encountered Jesus, in order to truly be His, we have to allow Jesus to shape our hearts.

I don’t know how anybody can watch that video and not think that those kids had their hearts shaped by Jesus in the process of the things they experienced. Over the years, I have no doubt that my interaction with the various kids that I’ve sponsored through Compassion have enabled the Lord, through those relationships, to begin to shape my heart so that I’m able to have my heart be broken by the things that break the Lord’s heart.

Alfredo was the first little boy I sponsored, way back when I didn’t have enough money to eat. I was a starving college and seminary student and didn’t know where my next meal was coming from. The Lord prompted me to sponsor Alfredo, who, at the time, was a cute little 5-year-old boy from Mexico. I sponsored Alfredo from the time he was 5 until the time he was 17. I watched him grow from a little boy with no hope for the future, in his own words, into a young man filled with all kinds of ideas about what the possibilities held. He gave his life to the Lord.

Later, I began to sponsor Gonzalo. I had actually gone to Mexico to visit Alfredo, and I went to a project called La Estrella. “La Estrella” is Spanish for “the star.” And this was a bright shining beacon of light in the midst of a desperately impoverished, dark neighborhood on the outskirts of Mexico City. And as I wandered around, the Compassion people always called me the pied piper, because wherever I went there would be this gaggle of boys all around me. I had a camera with a telephoto lens and they’d never seen one. And I’d let them play with it. And I would buy them bubble gum or candy and stuff, and so there was a crowd of boys around.

And finally, at one point, this small group of boys pushed me off to the side, kind of ... you could see they were steering me off to the side a little bit. And then this one little boy looked at

me, and he says, “You know, I have a sponsor.” And I said, “I know you do, and I think that’s great.” He said, “Jose — Jose has a sponsor.” And I said, “That’s great.” And he said, “Enrique has a sponsor.” I said, “That’s great.” “Daniel —Daniel has a sponsor.” I said, “That’s great.” And he points to Gonzalo. And Gonzalo, this kid right there, Gonzalo, he was about 12 or 13 at the time. Gonzalo was looking real pitiful standing there, you know. And he put his best pitiful face on, and he says, “Poor Gonzalo. Gonzalo doesn’t have a sponsor.” So real quickly I went to the Compassion people and said, “Do you think we can work it out in any way for me to sponsor Gonzalo?” And so Gonzalo had a sponsor until he was about 17 or 18 and left.

Later I sponsored Roger. I didn’t even know there were Mexicans named Roger, but I sponsored Roger; and then Luis from Ecuador. After I saw this movie, I thought, *oh, I want to sponsor a kid from Ecuador*, and so I sponsored Luis.

Next up on the list was Walter. Walter was kind of a unique relationship for me. Walter was about 8 or 9 when I first starting sponsoring him in Honduras. And he was the one that I told you about, that after a few visits down there, suddenly I discovered that he was on his way to the United States. And through a series of events that I don’t have near enough time to tell you about tonight, he ended up living with us here in the States for an extended period of time.

Walter eventually went back to Honduras, and I continued my relationship with his family and their community, did mission work in his town. We were able to build a home for his family, and I’ve been blessed to be able to help his brothers and sisters to stay in school.

Walter is the one, you will remember, who was murdered just a few weeks ago, shortly before his 22nd birthday. And I was there for his funeral. But even in the sadness of that event, I was able to sit and reflect on what, by the grace of God, we’ve been able to accomplish in his home, in his community, in his church, based on a single connection through Compassion.

I sponsored a little boy named Johnny from Colombia that grew up and got his circumstances going so well that one day I got a joy-filled letter from Johnny. He was only about

12. But he said because of the assistance that we've provided, his family had been able to get a leg up, and one thing had led to another and they were doing really well and no longer needed assistance. And he was grateful for what we had done.

I supported a boy named Miguel in Guatemala who was an older kid when I started sponsoring him. Compassion wrote to me and said they were having a hard time finding a sponsor for him and would I take him. And I said yes. I sponsored him for a few years. None of these kids are still with me. All of those kids eventually made professions of faith in Jesus Christ and their lives were changed.

Currently, Deedee and I are very blessed to sponsor a child in the Dominican Republic and a child in El Salvador — both of whom we've been sponsoring for a number of years — and a child in the Philippines that we've been sponsoring for about a year. And I just can't help myself. They sent us 150 child packets for the family church, and as I was going through the boxes and pulling out things, I took out another one, and so now we're sponsoring a child in Colombia.

You know what? God does not love me one bit more than if I'd never sponsored another child ... never sponsored a child at all. But this much I know. The act of trying to discover the compassion of God through tangible acts of love has caused me to grow in my capacity to love God and the things of God. It's not that Jesus is saying, "Earn your way to salvation by doing good things for the Lord." He's saying, "If you want Me to be in your heart, you're also gonna want to develop a heart that longs for the things that I long for." That's perhaps what Paul told the Colossian church: "So, as those who have been chosen by God holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience" [Colossians 3:12, NASB].

Jesus had already chosen the disciples. They knew that they were chosen. But then in the process He said, "Follow Me. I need to teach you hearts of compassion." It took some time, but eventually the disciples got to the point where they were able to have their hearts broken over the same things that broke the heart of the Lord. And as a result, they were a part of those sheep, just

as you can be a part of those sheep.

Jesus made a priority when He was on the earth of being around the least and the last and the lost, and I can guarantee you that when you make a priority of that, you will draw ever closer to Him.

My grandfather used to say something that I thought was really profound when I was a boy. And the older I've grown, the more I've come to know the truth of it. He would say, "Max, whenever you go out to do something for anyone, no matter what heart you think you're doing it with, when it comes right down to it, it will never be entirely clear who's serving whom."

You can never out-give God, because with a heart of love, He says, "Just try to give Me more than I can give you in return." Those are beautiful words in Matthew 25: "Come, oh, blessed of the Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the earth. For I was hungry, and you gave me something to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave me something to drink; I was naked, and you clothed me; I was sick, and you visited me; I was in prison, and you came to me; I was a stranger, and you invited me in. For as much as you've done it unto the least of these, my brothers and sisters, you have done it unto me."

I wonder what it takes for those of us who have everything — and in the eyes of the world, we have everything — to move beyond the hardness of our hearts to where we can be touched by the same things that touched the heart of God. I firmly believe that Jesus came to show us the way. And I think what He wants to say to us out of a heart of compassion tonight is the same thing that He said from the moment He began His ministry, which is simply this: "Follow Me."

Forty thousand children, on average, die every day in this world due to preventable causes, things like starving to death or dying from illnesses that are easily cured by cheap medication that is not available to them. And the most touching scene in this film is when the girl changes her button to read "39,999."

You can't change the world, but tonight before you leave — out there at one of those tables

— you can change the world for one person, and it might change your life in the process. So I want to invite you to do that.

Would you stand with me as we close out our service this evening? ... And I do want to say to you that. ...