

Russell Kelfer

Jesus Stopped!

1103-A

**Series: Why Do You Run When I'm Crying
(The Caring Church in a Hurting World)**



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The disciples were plagued with a spirit of confusion. They thought Jesus had come to build a Kingdom on earth, and yet it appeared to them that He was doing all the wrong things to attract the masses. Why just today, one of the wealthiest, most influential young men in all Israel had come forward wanting to join the church. Jesus told the man that first he had to go and sell all that he had and give it to the poor. The man walked away sorrowful. Why would the Master alienate one with such great potential? And just minutes later, Zebedee's wife had come to Jesus and asked if her sons could sit one on the right hand, and the other on the left when His Kingdom came. Jesus told her she didn't know what it was she was asking Him to do. He said, "The first shall be last, and the last shall be first." That only further confused His squabbling followers who by now were fuming with jealousy over the woman's request.

It was almost as though they understood theologically why He had come, but they did not understand practically what following Him entailed. They still wanted stars in their crowns and co-billing with God on the marquees of Heaven. They were willing to suffer a few inconveniences on earth if they knew that they would be heroes in heaven. They saw following Him much as they would envision belonging to a traveling Bible study group. They were going into "full time Christian service" and all they had to do to "be in the ministry" was make it to the meetings each day and lend Jesus a hand with the literature. It was as though God needed to use another object lesson if they were to get the picture. So He did. As the passage goes on it comes to a verse we read in our last lesson:

As Jesus and His disciples were leaving Jericho, a large crowd followed Him.

Two blind men were sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was going by, they shouted, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"

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The crowd rebuked them and told them to be quiet, but they shouted all the louder, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"
(Matthew 20:29-31 NIV)

What a ridiculous intrusion. Two blind men, possibly transients, sitting by the road were clamoring for Jesus' attention, and their loud screaming was annoying the somewhat dignified congregation that had gathered to hear more great theological gems fall from the lips of this incredible teacher. I love the next phrase. It is the essence of the ministry of God on earth. It says simply this:

Jesus stopped... (Matthew 20:32a NIV)

In the midst of it all He stopped dead in His tracks just as He did again and again and again in His ministry when someone had a need and they cried out to Him. It appeared that most of the time those who knew they had a need were those the disciples and the others following Jesus didn't want to get involved with: those who were lepers, diseased, emotionally uncontrollable, crippled, blind, deaf and mentally impaired. It was embarrassing to the disciples. They were trying to put their best foot forward and sell Christianity to a sea of doubting Thomases, and here Jesus lets a rich man walk away, then stops the whole church meeting to talk to two screaming blind men. How would they ever put this Christianity thing on the map if their leader kept spending His time, in public no less, with the strays of this world, and rejecting the kingpins of society? The verse goes on:

Jesus stopped and spoke to them. "What do you want me to do for you?" He asked.

"Lord," they answered, "we want our sight."

Jesus had compassion on them, and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed Him.

(Matthew 20:32-34 NIV)

Here were two men whose handicaps had relegated them to the scrapheap of life, and one man whose accomplishments had elevated him to the throne rooms of life. Jesus lets the "successful" one walk away, and stops to touch the men whom the world wanted to sweep under the carpet.

You see, these were the kinds of men He had come to save. These were the kinds of men He had come to serve. The Living God laid aside His robes of royalty and took upon Himself the cloak of a slave, and poured His life into the likes of blind and

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crippled and disturbed men and women, in order to demonstrate to the Church, His body on earth, what discipleship really is.

But the men on His board were so busy trying to increase their visibility and increase their numbers, they didn't even understand who it was Jesus had come to save. They were on such an ego trip trying to build the numbers that they walked right past the very people who wanted to enter. Not Jesus. Whenever He saw someone in trouble, someone hurting, in particular, someone crying or someone handicapped and unable to compete with the rest of society, He stopped. It didn't matter how busy the agenda was or how crowded the sanctuary was or how pressing the problems were, the Son of Man had come to serve, not be served. And the ones He had come to serve were those who knew they needed help. Many of those who knew they needed help were society's castoffs, those the world rejected because they were different.

Jesus loved those who were different because His Father had made them different. And He loved those who were weak because in them He could demonstrate His strength. He loved those who could not see because their eyes, uncluttered with the lusts of this world, were free to focus on things eternal. He loved those who could not walk because they, in their insufficiency, could learn to walk with God. He loved those whose bodies were twisted and diseased because He could infuse them with an inner beauty that would be unmistakably divine. So whenever Jesus saw someone who was handicapped or "abnormal" by man's standards, He stopped. For here were men and women the likes of which the Kingdom was made.

Most of the time, however, you and I don't stop. We run. We run the other way. We're offended and insecure in the presence of those who aren't "normal". Instead of seeing them as the glistening jewels in the crown of Glory, we see them as thorns in the side of a prospering church. We don't know what prosperity is. We often don't know what servanthood is either. These men didn't. And they were walking alongside the Greatest Servant who ever lived.

So we continue our study of the church in the midst of a crying world. And we continue our look at the principles, the promises, and the practicality of loving and serving the handicapped.

In our last lesson, we asked ourselves ten questions concerning the handicapped. I asked you to spend this week meditating on

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the accompanying Scriptures in order to form some convictions for yourself about God's perspective of those who are afflicted or handicapped. Today we are going to do three things: 1) we are going to turn those questions into precepts (unchanging principles of life); 2) we are going to take the stethoscope of life and try to measure the heartbeat of some men and women who do understand how the handicapped feel; 3) we're going to make a list of some practical things that you and I as individuals, and that churches as bodies of believers, can do to be God's men and women in a world of hurting and handicapped people.

I - THE PRINCIPLES

From the passages we considered together in our last study we can, I trust, draw some inescapable conclusions about the mind of God and of the handicapped. Let's quickly list them, and if indeed they are Scripturally unalterable precepts, then we ought to engrave them on our hearts and implant them in our lives as convictions. Let's look at just a few of them:

1- It is totally impossible to really know how much another person is hurting as we see in Proverbs 14:10. If you have not experienced exactly what they have, you can care, and you must, but you must never judge how badly another is hurting by how you think you would feel in the same situation. It is so wearisome to hear Christians give their patented "sermonettes" and say, "Oh, he really isn't suffering all that much," or, "She really just needs to shape up and carry on."

It's always interesting to see that same person when they pass through a trial that appears to be minimal compared to the one they glossed over. Suddenly the world is coming to an end. The difference? It happened to them! Not one person who is not blind can know the darkness a blind person feels. Not one person who can run and walk can know the helplessness of one confined to a wheelchair. Not one person who has only healthy, happy children can truly know the deep despair of parents who know their child will never walk or see or talk or hear. No, you cannot totally feel another's hurts. But you can listen and you can care. And you can increase your level of sensitivity until you at least in part enter into their hurts. And if the Mind of Christ is to control you, you must.

2- The Church of Jesus Christ, if it is to have the same

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priorities Jesus had, must stop what it is doing, if need be, when the handicapped have a need. He did, and we must, as we see in Matthew 20:30-33. Like the disciples, we are often so busy being enamored with those who can help the church we forget that the church was put here to serve, not to be served. I don't mean necessarily developing showy programs that call attention to what we are doing. Do that and we lose our reward. No, I mean the quiet, unobtrusive ways we can give ourselves to those who cannot help themselves, and to their parents, so the love of Christ is free to magnify itself like shock waves in the world about us. If we're too busy to do the things we will look at doing at the end of this lesson, then Beloved, we're too busy.

3- We simply must look at the handicapped the way Jesus does. He sees them as extra trophies of His Father's grace, extra recipients of His power, extra-ordinary examples of how that which is divine can supernaturally overtake that which is humanly inadequate. We must see the handicapped as privileged possessors of extra love. We must see them, as Paul did, as having greater spiritual potential, having seen themselves as weak in the flesh, thus becoming candidates for surrendering themselves to the One who is strong. Therefore, our witnessing outreach to them must be sincere, real, and consistent. For once saved, God has a gigantic mirror through which to magnify His name. We must love them continually and meet their needs consistently, for they are, so often, angels unawares sent to see if we will let God be God in us.

4- We must never forget that the inequities of the flesh are temporary, as we read in Revelation 21:4,5. In heaven the crippled boy will leap for joy. In heaven that blind woman will have eyes to behold the Glory of God. In heaven the mentally impaired man will think, act, and respond with the same quickness as the greatest genius who ever lived. That one who lives in a dungeon of depression will glow with joy in the courts of Glory. That one who lives entombed by fears will be free to enjoy the radiance of God's love. There will be no night there. There will be no pain there. There will be no sorrow there. There will be no handicaps there. Bodies will be whole. Minds will be whole. Spirits will be whole and wholly God's. And it is, remember, that person, that whole person, that you are really dealing with now.

5- Remember, Jesus Christ considers what you do to the least of these, to have been done to Him, as we see in

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Matthew 25:35-46. Don't tell me and don't tell God you just aren't talented like someone else is, that you can't minister like he does or she does. The greatest ministry in the world is the simple act of love given to one whose great need is a hidden camera from the heart of God focusing on your sensitivity and your unselfishness. When you let someone walk by who is crying and don't care enough to ask why, and don't care enough to stop and do something about it, then you are only pretending to be a disciple. That's exactly what John said in I John 3:13-18.

Those are just a few of the Scriptural principles that surfaced in my heart from the passages we promised to meditate on this last week. No doubt you can add dozens to that list. The truth is that they are the Truth. They are absolutes. As absolutes, they must become convictions. If they are convictions, then, they are no longer subject to question but must become the standards by which we live, by which we build the church, and from which we formulate our priorities as a body of Believers.

II - THE PERSONAL

As I mentioned last week, I endeavored to spend some time these past few weeks listening to and asking questions of those who are handicapped and those who have handicapped children. I concluded that I cannot fully experience either their hurts or their joys; but I did learn a few things about how those who are trapped in physical or emotional prisons, from the world's perspective, view themselves and how they view the church's concern for them.

I was, quite honestly, braced for an onslaught of criticism and bitterness for I know just how insensitive we as Christians can be. With rare exception, that was not the case. These people are, for the most part, so engulfed in the process of becoming godly that to be judgmental is not normal for them. By probing a little, and digging a little, a few realities became apparent.

1- Our compassion is usually concentrated in the early stages of suffering. We Christians are, for the most part, short-distance sprinters. There is a deep need for long-distance runners, for men and women who are just as concerned when that handicapped child is three years old, when the funeral was over a year ago, when the long days and the long nights seem to stretch into oblivion, and there seems to be no end. That's when the touch

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of love, the scent of compassion, and the word of encouragement carries with it the ring of authenticity.

2- It has become typical for Christian groups to disallow ministering to the handicapped because they are “not equipped.” That is, no doubt, true. The question that rings in the ears of those parents, however, is why don’t they become equipped? Why is it more logical for a secular school system to have a program for the disabled than it is for the schools whose avowed goal is to demonstrate and communicate the mind of God on earth? I realize it is expensive, yet, how can we justify more comfortable facilities for the healthy and excuse ministering to the needy as “impractical” or “unprofitable”? I personally believe if Jesus Christ were building a church or a school or a program to minister based on how He lived His life, He would make room for the crippled, the blind, and the handicapped first, then see to it that the needs of the rest were met with the overflow. Those of you who sit on boards of Christian organizations who shelve requests for meeting the needs of God’s “special” people might want to rethink your priorities. I’ve been there. I’ve not only heard all the excuses, I’ve used them. God forgive me.

3- The one thing that most handicapped persons and handicapped parents seem to want is to be quietly provided for, then naturally received. In other words, they don’t want fanfare. They don’t want tears and, “Oh, you poor dear!” They would like to see classes in place, teachers available, and programs planned. Then they would like to be treated as “normal” and not have attention drawn to their disability.

4- One thing few talk about but all feel, is the financial and emotional strain that handicaps place on the family. Seldom will you see a budgeted item in a church’s plan to provide medical care for its “special” people who are uninsurable without forcing them to go to the church’s benevolence committee for help. Scholarships to help them through the special educational processes are often only available through expensive private institutions. And few, if any, in the average church realize what added pressures that “special” one places on the husband-wife relationship and on the other children. Properly handled, they, too, become trophies of Grace. But when that handicapped child turns three and still can’t sit up, or turns five and still can’t walk, or turns ten and still can’t see and the heads turn and the mouths gape and no one knows what to say, the emotional pressures on those° who

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love and understand that child are multiplied a hundredfold. Think about it.

5- Finally, remember the story of the lost sheep and the lost coin. Jesus said the loving shepherd leaves the ninety and nine who are okay, and if need be, goes out alone seeking that one who is tangled up in the weeds and the thorns. At the expense of the multitude? Not really. It is to the benefit of the multitude to have a Shepherd who sees them individually and who is willing to risk his life, if need be, for the one with the greatest need. Unless you and I appropriate that mindset where the handicapped are concerned, we will always relegate them to the crumbs that fall from the table because the sheer pressure of the world's concepts of numbers takes its toll. It isn't always Scriptural to spend the most on those who constitute the largest group. Sometimes it is more Scriptural to give more and yield more to the ones who can't, so the ones who can will see life in its proper perspective.

III - THE PRACTICAL

With those thoughts in mind and with those principles in view, I would like to close this obviously incomplete two-lesson series on the handicapped with a few practical suggestions for those who would like to be "doers of the Word" and not "hearers only." I would like to outline some real steps you and I can take to make a difference in the lives of those whose very lives have been touched by the reality of lasting affliction. I would encourage you to at least prayerfully consider some of them.

There are some things we can do as individuals and some things that church groups as a whole need to do. Here are a few of them:

1- Don't forget that the hurt goes on. Mark your calendar at regular intervals to send notes of encouragement or cards of love to those who have "special" children. Send birthday cards. Most of them got lots of support in the early stages of their hurting. Now many of them feel that once the sensationalism of it wore off they are pretty much alone, needing to know somebody still cares.

2- Remember, there is no ministry greater than the ministry of prayer. If you know someone is crying inside, go into the inner chamber with God and stay there until you know the storm has passed and God has broken through the chains of depression and

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set them free. Occasionally call those who have special needs and ask them how to pray for them so you can update your prayer list with real needs and real requests.

3- The greatest need parents of “special” children seem to have is for regular times of respite. These are times away to refresh themselves and recharge their batteries or to spend quality time with their other children. For that to happen, caring Christians have to be available to come and take that handicapped child and love them and keep them, if possible, for a long enough period of time to set that family free to be itself. It won’t happen if we are jealous of our time. Babysitters are not easy to find for “special” children and often people will “volunteer” with good intentions but never quite be available when the need arises. Maybe someone within each local church needs to volunteer to be a clearing house and an enlistment person to draw people, train people, and schedule people to relieve those parents for at least a season of rest. I know, I know, we’re all busy. So was Jesus. But when those no one else had time for cried out, He stopped! How can we do less?

4- A scholarship fund for the handicapped in your own fellowship would be a quiet way to let them know you care. Not a big fund-raising drive or a campaign, but a simple opportunity to start and maintain a fund to help the families of the handicapped meet those crucial, never-ending financial crises that accompany living with the disabled. So often insurance is not available. So often the time that child demands interferes with one or both parent’s ability to earn an income. So often the price they must pay for the things we take for granted are enough to keep them in the throes of discouragement.

5- If you are involved with a Christian organization, make your voice heard. Speak out in love but speak out for the needs of the handicapped, the emotionally handicapped, the physically handicapped and the educationally handicapped. Let those in positions of responsibility know that this is a priority for you, not just for the parents whose children need their help.

6- Seek to become informed about the disabled. Ask intelligent questions. Learn why they are like they are. Learn what their strengths are and what they can do. Learn to treat them naturally. Learn to teach your children to treat them naturally. They need friends their own ages who accept them.

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7- Try to understand the rejection that a handicapped person feels. A friend of mine who has been blind from birth shared with me how the lack of acceptance as a child among his peers drove him to consider suicide for years. Only when Christ took control of his life and he experienced the full acceptance of God did his life take on real meaning.

In other words, it can all be boiled down to this: Don't run when they're crying. Don't put your hands over your ears or blinders over your eyes and pretend that the afflicted are not there or that they are not hurting. And don't be too busy to give of yourself to make their lives more meaningful. If it means giving up something else, do it. Become available to those who are hurting.

Right now, even this moment, we are addressing people whose lives have been eternally interrupted by a disability. They want to be normal. They want to be accepted. They want to have a reason for living. They are standing on the street corners of life crying, "Son of David, have mercy on me. Children of the Son of David, have mercy on me. Someone please have mercy on me." They are crying.

The crowds, even and especially the religious crowds, are telling them to be quiet. "Hush," they are saying, "don't bother the Master. He has so much to do to build the church and attract the crowds and teach the multitudes. He hasn't time for a few straggling, pathetic souls who happen to be crying. Be quiet. You'll disturb the others."

Listen. Here comes the Master. He's walking our way. He stopped! Jesus stopped! He turned from the jostling, cheering crowds, and He's standing there...alone with that handful of handicapped, hurting souls.

Look at Him. He's looking them right in the eye. Look at those eyes of love. He's reaching out. He's touching them. He's accepting them. He's making them the very center of His attention. Listen. He's talking just to them. He's saying, "What can I do for you? What can I do to make you know how special you are to My Father? What can I do to make you whole?" He is moved with compassion.

Look at their faces now. They are radiant with joy. Look at their eyes. They are filled with excitement. Look at their commitment. They have given their lives to following Him, all because, amidst

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the confusion and clamor of the multitudes, when they cried, Jesus stopped. May we henceforth do the same.

Let us pray.

Our Father,

This is a most difficult subject, so painful for those who have walked that road, so difficult for the rest of us to understand and yet so crucial and so vital because You spent so much time on this earth with the very people that we spend so much time avoiding.

Please, dear Father open our eyes to see the world the way You saw it, the way You see it, the way You want us to see it, that we might let Your hands and feet become our hands and feet that we might be willing to touch those who are hurting.

In Jesus precious name,

Amen.

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