



# The Middle East Initiative

Pray.  
Learn.  
Engage.

## The Happiness of Perfect Sympathy

By Behnan Konutgan

### Scripture

Matthew 9:36, 15:32, 25:34-45

Luke 10:25-37

1 John 3:16-20

“Blessed are the merciful, for they will obtain mercy”  
(Matthew 5:7)



### Text Exegesis

Those who have mercy are full of love, compassion, and sympathy towards others who are alone, who have no shelter, and who suffer. A merciful person has pity on those who are in need and homeless. The Christian acts in the model of the Lord Jesus, who had pity on the servant (Matt. 18:23-35).

The Hebrew word for mercy is *chesedh* and it is un-translatable word. It does not mean only to sympathize with a person in the popular sense of the term, nor does it mean simply to feel sorry for someone in trouble. *Chesedh*, mercy, means the ability to get right inside another person’s skin and see things with his eyes, think things with her mind, and feel things with their feelings.

Many people do not even try to do this. We are so concerned with our own feelings that we are not concerned with the feelings of anyone else. When we are sorry for someone, it is, as it were, from the outside. We do not make an effort to get inside the other person’s mind and heart. To do so is, of course, not easy, but as Christians our calling is to do so as Christ Jesus did. Our Lord was compassionate toward people in need and those marginalized by the rules of society, as exemplified in the story of the leper (Matt. 8:1-4). In that time, lepers were in terrible condition and were treated as

if they were, in effect, dead. And the lepers were cast out of the society. According to the law, it was even forbidden to touch them. But when Jesus saw the leper coming to him, “He stretched out his hand and touched him...and immediately his leprosy was cleansed.”

In the same way, as Christians our responsibility is to serve the world, to serve those in need, to be light and salt to them, and give them hope. Jesus our Lord is our example. He said, “I have compassion for the crowd” (Matt. 15:32). As “Jesus had compassion on [those in need]” so must we (Matt. 20:34). Jesus also wept for the bereaved. We have also to bear the failing and the weak and not to please ourselves.

### ***Relating the Text to Today***

In Turkey, we have been working among refugees from Iraq and Syria. There are between 2 and 3 million refugees in Turkey. We first visited the camps of Yezidis who came from the Sinjar Mountains in Iraq. The Islamic State (ISIS or ISIL) first killed thousands of them because they are not Muslim. The refugees were in terrible condition, having left their homes and taking nothing with them—no home, no country, no passport, no money, no food. We first embraced them, we spoke with them about hope, we loved them, and we prayed for them. Then we distributed food, medicine, clothes, and diapers for the children. We made several such visits to this camp.

We visited other camps as well. We are committed to the refugees who came from Kobani, Syria—the Kurdish people. We teach their children Arabic and math and sometimes we pray for them. We don’t evangelize to them, but we do say that the support is from the churches. We hear good stories and some of them have come to know Christ.

One day when we were visiting the camp in Antakya, a 65-year-old Turkish woman asked us if she could visit the camp with us, and we agreed. She came with paper and pens in her hand. We gathered the children and she distributed the paper and pens to them. Then she said write or draw something that you feel. After she collected the paper, she looked at them. Then we saw something. An 11-year-old boy, who cannot read or write, had drawn a cross with a man on it. We asked the boy who the man is. His answer, “This man on the cross is Jesus, and he is going to stop the war in Syria.”

There are hundreds of refugees around us. They are hopeless, weak, and very much in need. We should have a merciful heart toward them. We should visit them and help them with what they need, no matter their background, ethnicity, or religion. As Jesus did, we, as His followers, have to do the same.

Conclusion: Our attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus.

## **Questions**

1. What are the marks of true benevolence?
2. How can truly be concerned for the unfortunate?
3. What are the marks of the faithful Christian according to James 1:27?
4. What does it mean in practice to have the attitude of our Lord Jesus?

## **Prayer**

Our gracious father in Heaven, thank you for all your blessings on us. Thank you that you care for the people in the world, especially for the miserable people. Give us your Holy Spirit to give us power to be like you here on Earth. Give us love so that we can get right inside other people, until we can see with their eyes, think with their mind, and feel with their feelings. In Jesus name we ask, Amen.

**Behnan Konutgan** is a pastor and lecturer. He has worked for 20 years on the translation of the Bible into Turkish. He also worked on the Turkish Study Bible and is the author of the Turkish Bible Dictionary. He has written many articles in international and local magazines. At present, he is the pastor of a church in Istanbul and is the president of Martin Bucer Seminary in Istanbul. He is married with 3 boys.