

HE HAD COMPASSION

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on October 12, 1969 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

No story that Christ ever told is more widely known than the story found in the 10th chapter of the gospel of Luke, introduced by the line, "And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and made trial of him, saying, Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life? And he said unto him, What is written in the law? how readest thou? And he answered and said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself. And he said unto him, Thou hast answered right: this do: and thou shalt live. But he, desiring to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbor?"

Then comes the story. "And Jesus make answer and said, A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho; and he fell among robbers, who both stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance a certain priest was going down that way, and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And in like manner a Levite also, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he was moved with compassion, and came to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring on them oil and wine; and he set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him." (Luke 10:25-34). The story goes on to say that this Samaritan offered to pay any additional costs when he returned. Christ's hearer recognized that the Samaritan was the only one who proved neighbor to the poor dying man.

My reading of this story was primarily for the purpose of emphasizing the part of the text which reads, "He was moved with compassion ..." Our message today focuses upon this word. Compassion is not unduly difficult to define. It means sympathy for those in need. It may even involve some sense of pity. It has in it the idea of empathy, feeling with those who are in trouble. Of course, on its deepest level, compassion is just another way of referring to a strong, genuine feeling of love for those who are in need. Christ taught compassion as one of the most important principles in his kingdom. Not only did he teach it during his entire stay upon the earth, he demonstrated it over and over again.

Examples of Christ's Compassion

In the fifteenth chapter of Matthew we read, "And Jesus called unto him his disciples, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat; and I would not send them away fasting, lest haply they faint on the way." (Matt. 15:32). He then used seven loaves and a few fishes to provide miraculously enough food for the entire multitude of 4,000 men.

It is also interesting to note the setting in which this occurred. Jesus was beside the sea of Galilee, and the text says, "And there came unto him great multitudes, having with them the lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and they cast them down at his feet; and he healed them: insomuch that the multitude wondered, when they saw the dumb speaking, the maimed whole, and the lame walking, and the blind seeing: and they glorified the God of Israel." (Matt. 15:30-31). Jesus had compassion on the lame, the blind, the dumb, the maimed, and many others. The feeding of the multitude, as impressive as it is, was a lesser evidence of his concern for the people than that which preceded it and that which went on day after day during his entire ministry.

In the preceding chapter, Matt. 14, we read, "And he came forth, and saw a great multitude, and he had compassion on them, and healed their sick." (Matt. 14:14). This is the preface to the story of the feeding of the 5,000. In both cases these spectacular miracles of multiplying food for a hungry multitude were only part of the evidence of Christ's concern for his people.

There was yet another incident which showed his compassion. "And as they went out from Jericho, a great multitude followed him. And behold, two blind men sitting by the wayside, when they heard that Jesus was passing by, cried out, Saying, Lord, have mercy on us, thou son of David. And the multitude rebuked them, that they should hold their peace: but they cried out the more, saying, Lord, have mercy on us, thou son of David. And as Jesus stood still, and called them, and said, What will ye that I should do unto you? they say unto him, Lord, that our eyes may be opened. And Jesus, being moved with compassion, touched their eyes; and straightway they received their sight, and followed him." (Matt. 20:29-34).

Yet another familiar incident is found in Mark 1:40-42, where we read, "And there cometh to him a leper, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And being moved with compassion, he stretched forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou made clean. And straightway the leprosy departed from him, and he was made clean." It is difficult at this distance for us to realize the great joy that came into the life of each of these people whom Jesus healed. It is impossible for us to understand in any full sense the great rejoicing that came to the members of their families and to their friends. How many blessings Jesus brought by his compassion for those who were in need.

Just here it might be well for us of the 20th century who wear Christ's name to remember that we, too, can help those who are blind, or maimed, or sick, or poor. Though we do not have any miraculous power, such as that which Jesus used, we can provide food, clothing, medical care, and other evidences of our concern. Although we may never even approach the depth of Christ's compassion for those in need, we can, if we wish, have something of the same compassionate love, and can provide at least something of what people need. In a limited sense we can do what Jesus did, if we have even a little of the compassion that he had.

A favorite story of most of us is that found in Mark 10:13-16, where we find the reading, "And they were bringing unto him little children, that he should touch them: and the disciples rebuked them. But when Jesus saw it, he was moved with indignation, and said unto them, Suffer the little children to come unto me; forbid them not: for to such belongeth the kingdom of God ... And he took them in his arms, and blessed them, laying his hands upon them." The disciples felt that he had no time to waste upon little people. Jesus felt differently, taking time even for children. And, who knows, but that some of these little ones for whom Jesus had time when they were children may have become stalwart leaders in his church when they were mature men and women.

Yet another example of Christ's compassion is found in the words, "And it came to pass soon afterwards, that he went to a city called Nain; and his disciples went with him, and a great multitude. Now when he drew near to the gate of the city, behold, there was carried out one that was dead, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not. And he came nigh and touched the bier; and the bearers stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he gave him to his mother." (Luke 7:11-15).

Jesus was deeply concerned about this poor widow and her broken heart. While it was true that this young man was raised from the dead only for a few years and then died again, and while it is true that this little incident of raising one young man from the dead is not numerically significant when you think of all the billions of people who have lived and died, it is also true that this shows the compassion of our Lord for those who are sorrowful. And that is important. If he was concerned about this mother who wept, he is concerned about all mothers who weep.

The final paragraph of the ninth chapter of Matthew might well be a summary of all we have tried to say, "And Jesus went about all the cities and the villages, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of disease and all manner of sickness. But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion for them, because they were distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a shepherd. Then saith he unto his disciples, The harvest indeed is plenteous, but the laborers are few. Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he send forth laborers into his harvest." (Matt. 9:35-38). After nearly twenty centuries Christ's expression "they were distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a shepherd," is still about the best description of the human race that I know. Amid all of the voices that cry out in our day, amid all of the different ideas that clamor for acceptance, amid all of the roads that open up before us, mankind is still distressed and scattered, as sheep not having a shepherd.

#### Christ's Greatest Concern

Of all the things which Jesus did to show his concern for mankind, the greatest by far was his willingness to leave heaven and come to live on the earth, among men. We are all familiar with the words, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, what whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life." (John 3:16). Another meaningful description of what Jesus did is found in Phil. 2:5-8, where the apostle writes, "Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross."

Christ not only left heaven and lived on the earth for a third of a century in what we would think was abject poverty, but he was willing to die on the cross that man might be redeemed from his sins. In his Roman letter Paul puts this in sharp focus, "For while we were yet weak, in due season Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: for peradventure for the good man some one would even dare to die. But God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." (Rom. 5, 6-8)

#### Christ's Compassion For Us

Not only did Christ have a deep loving concern for those of his own day, he has such a concern for those of us who live now. In the first place, he has given us the Bible to guide us. It helps us to determine the course that our lives should take. It helps us avoid pitfalls and guides us to proper goals in life. It gives us security and confidence that we are following the right road. It is because of his concern for us that we have this inspired map of the way men should live in order to be happy both here and hereafter.

Christ has sent the Holy Spirit to comfort us. In those final hours before his death on the cross, he told his disciples, "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive; for it beholdeth him not, neither knoweth him. Ye know him, for he abideth with you, and shall be in you ... These things have I spoken unto you, while yet abiding with you. But the Comforter, even the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he

shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you.” (John 14:16-17, 25-26). Jesus has also given us the privilege of prayer. When we have some special burden or special need, we have access to the throne of God. Jesus said, “Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for everyone that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.” (Matt. 7:7-8).

Yet another of the great blessings that our Lord has given us is found in the comforting promises which we find in the New Testament. In Romans 8:28, for example, we read, “And we know that to them that love God all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose.” In I Cor. 10:13, there is this great comforting word, “There hath no temptation taken you but such as man can bear: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able; but will with the temptation make also the way of escape, that ye may be able to endure it.”

One of the dearest of all the promises, of course, is that found in John 14:1-3, where Jesus says, “Let not your heart be troubled: believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” These are only a few of the great promises that demonstrate Christ’s continuing concern for us.

### Conclusion

As the sun warms the earth, so the love of God and Christ blesses our lives. May it be that we will have the same compassion for those about us, and by reflecting this divine love, be a blessing to all those among whom we live and work. Our world needs nothing so much as it needs compassion. What a difference it would make in families, in neighborhoods, among nations. Deep, genuine concern for others is the missing ingredient in our modern 20th century. Without it our intricate, interpersonal relationships move sluggishly and often break down. If we would be like him whose name we wear, we must have compassion for our fellowmen.