

Jesus' Example of Compassion

*“Jesus went forth,
and saw a great
multitude, and was
moved with
compassion toward
them, and he
healed their sick.”
—Matthew 14:14*

LOVE IS THE VERY ESSENCE

of the Heavenly Father's character, for “God is love.” (I John 4:8,16) It finds expression in various ways. It is manifested in the giving of one's time, strength, or substance that another might be fed, clothed, or instructed. It is shown in yielding one's own will to that of another, and in a hundred different sacrifices, large and small, that the lives of others might be made a little brighter, and their burdens and grief's less heavy.

Compassion seems to be a very special manifestation of love. It is a form of love that springs from the deepest recesses of the heart. To be compassionate means to be sympathetic and understanding. It means to be moved with pity for the unfortunate and the sorrowing. It means, literally, to suffer together with those who are suffering. It is possessed in abundant measure by our Heavenly Father, and it is shared in like measure by Christ Jesus our Lord.

This compassion which the Lord felt toward the sick and dying world, of which our opening text speaks, did not begin with his earthly ministry. It had older, deeper roots. It began long before, with the creation and ages-long preparation of the earth when it was without form and void, unprepared for habitation by human beings. The provision of light to combat the darkness; the establishment of the atmosphere through which would drift the beautiful clouds, gathering up moisture with which to water and refresh the earth; the separation of the seas from the dry land; the seeding of the earth's hills and valleys to bring forth grass and fruit-bearing trees; the making manifest in the heavens of the sun and the moon to divide the day from the night; the filling of the seas, the land and the skies with marvelous living creatures—all this mighty and loving provision had first to be accomplished by the Son of God, at the direction of his Heavenly Father. God's son, in his prehuman existence, is identified by John as the "Word" [Greek: *Logos*], who was with God throughout the creative process. "All things were made by him [the *Logos*]; and without him was not any thing made that was made."—John 1:1-3

Then came the day when man himself would be created, this new being for whose sole benefit and joy all this mighty preparation had been made. The *Logos* also had a part in that creation. We read in Genesis, "God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." God also planted a garden "eastward in Eden; and

there he put the man whom he had formed.”—
Gen. 1:26; 2:8

What a joy it must have been to the Heavenly Father and his Son, the Logos, to create this new human being, formed out of the dust of the earth. He could think; he could freely make his own decisions; he could praise God; he could even multiply and eventually fill the earth with perfect offspring! What wonderful prospects were promised for his everlasting enjoyment of life on earth!

However, he who had shared in this loving work of creating man, to which so much careful attention had been devoted, was also to be a witness of his fall into sin, and man’s condemnation to death. God’s son beheld, no doubt with great sorrow, the terrible downward drift of humankind into sin and sickness, sorrow and suffering, disease and death.

FOREKNOWN OF GOD

This eventuality was not unforeseen by the Heavenly Father, for he possesses foreknowledge beyond human comprehension. “I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.” (Isa. 46:9,10) One wonders if the Logos also possessed this ability to foreknow events. Was he prepared for the terrible sentence which justly fell on the human being, in whose creation he had participated with such loving care?

The Apostle Peter writes, “Ye were not redeemed with corruptible things; ... But with the precious blood of Christ, as a lamb without blemish, and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the

foundation of the world.” (I Pet. 1:18-20) John the Revelator refers to Jesus as “the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.” (Rev. 13:8) Thus we see that the Heavenly Father foreknew that man would fall. He also knew that his only begotten Son, our Lord Jesus, would give his life that man might be redeemed from the sentence of death. Did Jesus in his prehuman existence as the Logos know this? If not, when did he learn of it? We cannot know, but at the proper time God revealed his plan for man’s redemption to his beloved Son.

Why did God’s Son accept this commission, and come to earth as man’s Redeemer? He had glory, honor and fellowship with the Father. For one thing, he did it simply because it was his Father’s desire for him to do so. “Lo, I come: in the volume of the book it is written of me, I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.” (Ps. 40:7,8) That it was the Father’s will would be reason enough. Even in that final extremity of anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane, before his crucifixion, Jesus said, “O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.”—Matt. 26:39

However, there was another reason. For some four thousand years the Logos had observed the degraded state of that marvelous human being in whose creation he had been so closely associated. He had noted his fall from that glory, perfection and happiness enjoyed by father Adam in Eden. He had seen him entangled in the cords of sin, immersed in strife and wars, laid low by disease, suffering and death. The Son of God greatly desired to have a part in bringing about the recovery of fallen man

JESUS' COMPASSION FOR MANKIND

Jesus tells us of his Father's great love for man, even in his fallen condition, saying, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (John 3:16) Jesus shared that same love for mankind, and in his compassion for the human race he gave up the glory and fellowship he had with the Father. "He took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." (Phil. 2:7,8) Paul also tells us that the Son of God was "made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, ... that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man."—Heb. 2:9

That love and compassion which moved our Lord to forsake his high position with the Heavenly Father characterized his entire ministry here on earth. Wherever he went he was exposed to the sorrows, sickness and suffering of the people, and his heart went out to them. Time and again we read that great multitudes followed him, and he healed them. (Matt. 4:24; Mark 3:10; Luke 9:11) When Jesus heard of the death of John the Baptist we are told that "he departed thence by ship into a desert place apart: and when the people had heard thereof, they followed him on foot out of the cities." He was "moved with compassion toward them," as stated in our opening text. He healed all those who were sick, and then fed the multitude of five thousand.—Matt. 14:13-21

Matthew also writes that "Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues,

and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd." (Matt. 9:35,36) On still another occasion we read that "Jesus called his disciples unto him, and said, I have compassion on the multitude, because they continue with me now three days, and have nothing to eat: and I will not send them away fasting, lest they faint in the way." Finding that the disciples had seven loaves and a few small fishes, he gave thanks, and then proceeded to feed some four thousand men, besides the women and children that were with them.—Matt. 15:32-38

Jesus did not restrict his compassionate attention to the multitudes. He was deeply touched with the infirmities of individuals, as in the case of the leper. "There came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean. And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed." —Mark 1:40-42

Then there was that moving incident in the city of Nain, recorded for us by Luke: "It came to pass the day after, that he went into a city called Nain: and many of his disciples went with him, and much people. Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, 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 and touched the bier: and they that bare him 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 delivered him to his mother.” (Luke 7:11-15) As the woman thus received her son back from death, how the evidence of her joy must have lifted some of the burden of his ministry from the Master’s heart.

We recall, too, the death of Lazarus, and how his sorrowing sisters, Mary and Martha, sent for Jesus. The sisters, in their grief, went out to meet the Lord, and “when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled, And said, Where have ye laid him? They said unto him, Lord, come and see. Jesus wept. Then said the Jews, Behold how he loved him!” (John 11:32-36) Jesus then restored Lazarus to life.

Even in the Garden of Gethsemane, when being apprehended shortly before his crucifixion, Jesus again manifested his mercy and compassion, this time toward one of his enemies. In an impulsive move to protect his Master, “Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest’s servant, and cut off his right ear. Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” (John 18:10,11) Jesus then touched the servant’s ear, and healed it. (Luke 22:51) There, in the very center of that tumult, was one who was calm. He never for an instant forgot

that he was the Son of God, and that he had come into the world to be man's Redeemer. With no thought for his own plight, and unmindful of the fact that his own death was imminent, Jesus mercifully healed the man's ear. How often must our Lord have longed for that time, still unknown to him, when not just one here and one there would be healed, made to see, or restored to life. Much more, he looked forward to when the whole dead and dying world of mankind would come under the healing, life-giving ministrations of the kingdom.

Not many ever thanked Jesus. On one occasion he healed ten lepers, and only one returned, giving him thanks and glorifying God. Jesus said, "Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger." (Luke 17:11-19) However, this almost universal ingratitude did not deter our Lord, for he knew that godly compassion is not bestowed only on those who can repay, or who may render thanks.

At the very end, we witness Jesus' love for his fellow countrymen, and we hear a despairing cry that seems to come from the depths of his soul. "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matt. 23:37) He had come "unto his own, and his own received him not," but this did not diminish his love and compassion for them. (John 1:11) No wonder we read that the "common people heard him gladly." Truly, we have a High Priest who was "touched with the feeling of our infirmities." He was moved with pity for all

humanity. He suffered with them, and finally he gave his life for them.—Mark 12:37; Heb. 4:15

RAISED FROM THE DEAD

Then came Jesus' resurrection from the grave. As he was brought forth from the tomb by his Heavenly Father, to find himself freed from the bands of death, we can imagine that first marvelous, sweet moment of exhilaration that must have filled his being, realizing that his sacrifice was finished, and accepted of the Father. Perhaps his very first thoughts centered on that wonderful prophetic promise, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thy Holy One to see corruption. ... in thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore."—Ps. 16:10,11

During those sometimes lonely days of his ministry, how often he must have thought of that wonderful association he had previously enjoyed with the Creator. He must have longed to be with his Father, to complete his present work, and to fellowship once again with the one to whom he had been "daily his delight." (Prov. 8:30) Before he could ascend to the Father, however, he had yet another task to perform. He must go back to his disciples, those sheep without a shepherd, to manifest himself, to comfort them, and to assure them of his resurrection.

In his various appearances to the disciples, we find that same gentle love and compassion that had marked Jesus' entire earthly ministry. We recall his tender concern for the two discouraged disciples on the road to Emmaus, his kindly revelation of himself to Mary at the tomb, and his patience with

Thomas. (Luke 24:13-32; John 20:11-17,24-29) How these encounters must have touched his heart!

THE JOY SET BEFORE HIM

The apostle tells us that it was for “the joy that was set before him” that Jesus “endured the cross, despising the shame.” (Heb. 12:2) What was that joy? It likely sprang from many sources. It surely included the anticipation of returning to his Father’s fellowship, the promise of immortality, and the knowledge that he had been obedient to his Father’s will. Perhaps his greatest joy, however, was the prospect of blessing all the families of the earth, all of those dying multitudes toward whom his heart went out in pity, and for whose sufferings he was so moved with compassion. The knowledge of that joyous prospect would sustain and direct him in the way of sacrifice. Indeed, true compassion for one’s fellow man can be a source of strength and power in the Christian way.

As a man, Jesus had no natural seed of his own. “Who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living.” However, the prophet informs us that he will indeed have a seed. “He shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.” That pleasure of God which shall prosper in the hand of the glorified Jesus is the bringing of the world of mankind back into harmony with the Creator during the Messianic kingdom. To these our Lord Jesus will be an “everlasting Father.” The whole restored world of mankind will be his children. Those who are obedient to the righteous laws of that kingdom arrangement will no longer be a dead and dying

race, but a happy, healthy people, to enjoy everlasting life in a perfect paradise on earth.—Isa. 53:8-10; 9:6,7

All who are motivated by the same joyous hope of blessing all the families of the earth that moved our Lord to lay down his life in sacrifice; all who are constrained by that same compassion toward the world to walk in his sacrificial steps, will join their Lord Jesus in the presence of the Heavenly Father. As our Lord during his earthly ministry healed the sick, the lame, the blind, so it will be our joy in the kingdom to be associated with him in healing and restoring to perfect life here on earth, the whole world of mankind.—Rom. 8:16-18; Gal. 3:26-29; Rev. 3:21

With such a prospect, let us, then, seek to emulate the loving compassion of Jesus, especially in these troubling times, when mankind is in such great distress and turmoil. Let us each strive to be examples of care, tenderness, and sympathy in our daily life and in our dealings with the world around us. By so doing, we too can look forward to the realization of that which so inspired our Lord Jesus: “In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.”—Ps. 16:11 ■