Lord, Teach Us Compassion

Is our world today characterized, generally, by compassion? If we answer no, and I think tragically we’d have to, the reason is we have not learned compassion from the compassionate Christ. It may be far too many people have become callous rather than compassionate. It may be we’ve lost sight of the compassion of Christ and the teaching He left us on compassion, as well as other things that are important and impact upon our eternal lives. If we are to learn to be compassionate, we could go to no greater, more perfect source than the compassionate Christ.

Webster defines compassion as “suffering with another, hence, sympathy; sorrow for the distress or misfortune of another with a desire to help; pity; commiseration.” I recall seeing a television program in which children were being interviewed, discussing AIDS, a terrible disease that many times affects innocent little children. At least some, if not all of the children in this group had learned they had AIDS. One little girl was asked how she wanted to be viewed by others. Tears welled up in her eyes and began to stream down her cheeks, and she said she just wanted to be treated like a normal child and for other children to play with her and treat her normally. As one watched those tears stream down her cheeks, one could not help but have compassion for her. We need to practice compassion.

In order to learn compassion, we need to turn to the source of it, the Master Teacher. We need to cry, in effect, “Lord, teach us compassion.” Let us examine three ways in which Christ helps us to manifest this beautiful, but seemingly elusive quality in today’s self serving society.

First, the Lord taught compassion as He lived among men by His touch, by His willingness to touch others. The hands of Jesus touched those who were sick to heal them. In Mark 1:40-41 for example, we read these words, “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.”

People were fearful of lepers and the terrible, contagious disease leprosy. Lepers were pitiful, outcast creatures, separated from society. Yet, Jesus was willing not only to heal this individual but He reached out to him and touched him.

Jesus was willing to touch the lives of all men, regardless of race, regardless of social or economic standing. Jesus Christ, the compassionate Christ, had time for others. He had time to touch the children who were brought to Him. He had time to pray for them. In Matthew 19:13-15 we read these words: “Then were there brought unto him little children, that he should lay his hands on them, and pray: and the disciples rebuked them. But Jesus said, Suffer the little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for to such belongeth the kingdom of heaven. And he laid his hands on them, and departed thence.”

Have you seen the bumper sticker that says, “Have you hugged your kid today?” Our children need a
loving touch and words of love and encouragement. However, their greatest need is a spiritual need; they need spiritual guidance. Physical infirmities moved Jesus with compassion, but there was a greater illness, a spiritual sickness; and it was this concern that brought Jesus Christ to earth to live among men, to leave the glories of heaven to become flesh and blood, and to dwell among us.

In Matthew 9:36-38, the Scripture says, “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.”

Jesus touched those shunned by the religious elite of His day, the Pharisees and others who were His critics and His enemies. Jesus answered His critics with poignant and powerful lessons on the value of one soul, one individual. To the lawyers of His day, He said, “ye load men with burdens grievous to be borne, and ye yourselves touch not the burdens with one of your fingers.” Sharp rebuke was issued by the compassionate Christ toward those who were His enemies and the enemies of truth who would lead souls of astray.

The Pharisees of Jesus’ days did their works to be praised from men. The compassion was missing because the message and the motivation behind it were misunderstood and misapplied. As Christians, if we are Christians having obeyed the gospel of Christ, we must not be guilty of the same misapplication of truth, which leads to self righteousness and breeds contempt rather than compassion.

In 1 John 3:17-18, the Scripture says, “But whoso hath the world’s goods, and beholdeth his brother in need, and shutteth up his compassion from him, how doth the love of God abide in him? My Little children, let us not love in word, neither with the tongue; but in deed and truth.” Not only what we say, but what we do is very important.

Secondly, we see the Lord taught compassion by His tears. The Lord’s tears of compassion for the lost sheep of the house of Israel are depicted in Luke 19:41-44: “And when he drew nigh, he saw the city and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known in this day, even thou, the things which belong unto peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes. For the days shall come upon thee, when thine enemies shall cast up a bank about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall dash thee to the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.”

Jesus wept because His own Jewish brethren refused His teachings, and this brought Him to tears. Fully aware of the baptism of suffering that He would have to endure and undergo for His own brethren in the flesh, He grieved. But, He grieved not for himself, but for them. He knew the horrible nature of the crucifixion He must endure, the blood that must be shed, and yet He grieved for them. What an attitude which returns compassion for cruelty!

The apostle Paul, the man who admonished us to follow him as he followed Christ in 1 Corinthians 11:1, was one who learned well this attitude of compassion. He writes in Romans 10:1-3, “Brethren, my heart’s
desire and my supplication to God is for them, that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God.” Earlier in Romans 9:1-3, Paul wrote, “...I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren.” What a marvelous spirit was manifested by the apostle Paul.

How many tears are being shed today for millions who’ve never known the compassionate Christ? When we are sensitive to the soul’s value, to its immortality, the impending judgment, and the destination of the disobedient, hearts will be filled with compassion as tears fill the eyes. But, we will not only weep, we will work (as did the Lord) to take the saving message of truth into all the world. Compassion will compel us to do so.

When we understand the compassion of Christ (if we are outside of Christ, if we are not Christians), it should cause us to respond to that compassion with deep emotion, with love and gratitude for what He has done out of His compassion and love, and to become His followers, to turn our backs upon this world and to come to Christ. Jesus knew the urgency of His mission on earth. He came to save. In John 9:4, He said, “I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.” (KJV)

In John 4:31-35, we have this exchange between the Lord and His disciples recorded: “In the mean while the disciples prayed him, saying, Rabbi, eat. But he said unto them, I have meat to eat that ye know not. The disciples therefore said one to another, Hath any man brought him aught to eat? Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to accomplish his work. Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh the harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, that they are white already unto harvest.” Jesus said physical food is not as important as spiritual meat, spiritual responsibilities.

The expression, “Jesus wept,” in John 11:35, is a revealing passage on compassion. How revealing those two little words are on this matter of compassion. Those who were present on the occasion of Lazarus’ death and the impending resurrection from the dead (as Jesus was about to call him forth from the tomb) saw the tears as tokens of love and compassion for a departed friend and loved one. Remember the apostle Paul said, “Weep with those who weep.”

Many times consolation has been extended among friends not by words, but simply by weeping? And, so much was conveyed just in the tears that were shed. We need to turn to the Lord and say, Lord, teach us by thy tears to show compassion, not merely to extend it by our words, but to show it.

Finally, the Lord taught compassion by His testament, the New Testament, the last will and testament of Christ. The motivation for all Jesus taught was compassion and love. Notice Mark 6:34, “And he came forth and saw a great multitude, and he had compassion on them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things.” The Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ, had compassion for His sheep. His teaching was designed to bring them into the sheepfold of safety, to lead them through the pastures in peace, to provide them with the bread of life, and, ultimately, to place them on His right hand at...
the judgment, approved of God and Christ and able to enjoy Heaven through all eternity.

Two familiar lessons from Luke’s account of the gospel show us the importance Jesus placed on compassion. The parable of the good Samaritan, for example, demonstrates great compassion in the relieving of physical suffering. A wonderful spirit is exhibited by the Samaritan as he is depicted! Remember, the Samaritans were hated by the Jews. It would have been easy for this man traveling the Jericho road to pass by the severely injured man, as the priest and the Levite had done, but he did not. He showed compassion. He was not bitter because of the discrimination shown to him at the hands of the Jews. He saw a man in need, and his heart was moved in compassion. He became involved. He did something. His funds became involved. He gave the innkeeper enough money to care for this man while he was away, and he said, “If I owe you more, I will pay you when I get back.”

We need to be involved to the best of our ability in benevolence toward others. Benevolence alone does not save, but one cannot be saved without being benevolent, without showing compassion toward all who suffer.

Then, in Luke 15:1-10, Jesus teaches by parable the importance of one soul. The case of the prodigal son is a picture of compassion for the penitent, for those who are willing to turn from sin and to come back to God.

As we conclude, this needs to be our cry to the Lord concerning compassion: “Lord, teach us to have compassion by the touch of thy hand and the tears on thy face! Lord, teach us to have compassion for the sick and the sinner of every tribe and race! Lord, teach us to have compassion through the truth of thy testament, final and complete! Lord, teach us to have compassion that we may receive it one day when thee we meet!”