

THE MAGNIFICENT LOVE OF CHRIST

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The love of Christ, which passeth knowledge  
(Eph. 3:19).

Since the beginning of the Christian era preachers have tried to express the wonder of the love of Christ, yet all would agree this cannot be expressed in word. When Paul wrote to the Ephesian Christians. He hoped they would `be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth. and length. and depth. and height; And to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge" (Eph. 3:18-19). Even the apostle admitted what he desired would be impossible. How can any man know something which is beyond knowledge? He spoke of the breadth, length, depth, and height, but one might ask, how are those dimensions measured? The scientists speak of eternity in terms of space as well as time. If their conclusions be correct, even height baffles comprehension. The poet wrote:

Could we with ink the ocean fill,  
And were the skies of parchment made.  
Were every stalk on earth a quill,  
And every man a scribe by trade,  
To write the love of God above,  
Would drain the ocean dry.  
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,  
Though stretched from sky to sky.

The Bible described the love of God, the Savior manifested it. and men talk about it. Divine love as seen in Christ was and is still the greatest power in the world. Seven incidents in the New Testament describe the great compassion of the Lord.

Compassion Caring

But when he [Christ] saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd (Matt. 9:36).

Increasing excitement had gripped the citizens of Palestine. The appearance of a strange preacher had stirred their emotions. They had temporarily abandoned their daily routine and left

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everything to follow Jesus. He was different from any other speaker. He uttered words of profound wisdom, and healed sick people. From all parts of the country crowds had come, and the future promised to be thrilling. Fishing boats were high and dry on the beaches, and even their owners seemed unconcerned that their livelihood was in jeopardy. Life was at a standstill. People needed to return to their homes, but were reluctant to leave they might miss something! The women with children were becoming anxious, and food was in short supply. The desire to remain with the Savior was irresistible.

"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." The Lord understood the predicament; they were tired, and the children were restless. Jesus appreciated the difficulty. and His love overflowed "He was moved with compassion."

Robert Harkness evidently considered this great fact when he wrote:

Does Jesus care when my heart is pained

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Too deeply for mirth or song?  
As the burdens press, and cares distress,  
And the way seems weary and long?  
Oh yes, He cares; I know He cares;  
His heart is touched with my grief:  
When the days are weary, the long nights dreary,  
I know my Saviour cares.

### Compassion Curing

And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick (Matt. 14:14).

Matthew explained that Jesus was filled with compassion because the people were as sheep without a shepherd. They had no leader to provide sustenance for their souls. This fact was accentuated when John the Baptist was murdered. He had been a faithful witness, and his great meetings in the Jordan Valley were destined to be remembered forever. His death meant that only Jesus remained to supply the Bread of Life. The wilderness

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preacher had accurately predicted his demise when he said, "He [Christ] must increase, I must decrease." When John's disciples described their master's funeral, the Savior felt the need of being alone with God. He stepped into a small boat and prepared to sail to an uninhabited place somewhere along the shore of the Sea of Galilee where He could be free from clamoring crowds. His plans were never fulfilled, for when the boat approached the shoreline, people who had walked around the head of the lake were waiting to greet Him. Their faith and hope were clearly expressed when they placed sick friends at His feet. They had arrived at the same conclusion which made Simon Peter say, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:68). Jesus knew the people were dependent upon His kindness. He could not disappoint them. "He healed their sick." The sun was beginning to set when "the Sun of Righteousness arose with healing in his wings" (see Mal. 4:2).

Perhaps it was significant that Jesus healed the sick before He fed the multitude. Some of the participants might not have enjoyed their food had they been worrying whether or not their journey had been in vain. Ultimately, the meal became a joyful thanksgiving banquet, and perhaps the happiest one sharing the provision was the Lord Himself.

### Compassion Considering

Then 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 (Matt. 15:32).

The crowd was overwhelmingly enthusiastic. The people had followed Jesus for three days. They were hungry, but no one complained. Their patience had been rewarded when the Savior healed all types of diseases. Matthew said "great multitudes came unto him, having with them those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus' feet; and he healed them." Language could not express the extent of the people's enthusiasm. They had witnessed sights at which angels would rejoice. Even the need for food was temporarily forgotten as they watched the miracles of Jesus.

Nevertheless, the Lord was greatly concerned. When other

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men might have rejoiced at the unprecedented acclamation, He thought of the fatigue that threatened His congregation. Children were hungry. mothers were becoming anxious, and even men ran the risk of collapsing as they journeyed homeward. Even spiritual ecstasy cannot prevent physical exhaustion. The people needed nourishment.

Jesus was a very considerate leader. When the disciples might have been irritable because of continuous pressure. the Lord remained calm and dignified. He thought only of other people. To prevent a forthcoming problem. He prepared a banquet in the wilderness. Believing that prevention is better than cure, He fed the congregation and provided the strength necessary for their immediate future. Jesus met their past needs when he healed the sick, their present needs when He fed the hungry. and the future necessity by supplying strength to go home.

Sometimes God's children worry unnecessarily. They become anxious about things that never happen. The miracle of the loaves and fishes demonstrated His ability to understand future problems and assist His trusting followers.

### Compassion Cooperating

And behold, two blind men sitting by the way side, when they heard that Jesus passed by. cried out, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David. And the multitude rebuked them, because they should hold their peace: but they cried the more, saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David. And Jesus stood still, and called them, and said, What will ye that I shall do unto you? They say unto him, Lord, that our eyes might be opened. So Jesus had compassion on them, and touched their eyes: and immediately their eyes received sight, and they followed him (Matt. 20:30-34).

They were beggars, two blind men who hoped people would be generous. Deprived of their vision, they had become accustomed to living in darkness. The psalmist said. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork" (Ps. 19:1). but unfortunately the beggars could not read the message in the sky. If they had been born blind, they had never seen the stars. If they had become blind, they could only rely on memories of the past. Some sightless men could have

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been prosperous. but others sat hopelessly in darkness. Even money could not compensate for their affliction.

Today something special was taking place. Many people were in the street. and the beggars expectantly held out their hands. Probably the crowds were not interested: their attention was elsewhere. When the men were informed that Jesus. the Healer from Nazareth. was passing by. they began to shout. "Have mercy on us. thou Son of David." Their piercing cries were heard above the clamor of the people who immediately complained, telling them to be quiet. They probably said, "Hold your peace. That rabbi cannot be bothered by beggars." "But they cried the more.

And Jesus stood still, and called them, and said. What will ye that I shall do unto you?" Had those desperate men been influenced by the crowd or permitted doubt to silence their request, they would have remained in the dark. That Jesus heard and responded to the cry for help. provided convincing evidence that God who sees a wounded sparrow falling to the ground (see

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Matt. 10:29) could also hear cries for help even above the clamor of excited people.

Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,  
Uttered or unexpressed:  
The motion of a hidden fire,  
That trembles in the breast.

Prayer is the simplest form of speech.  
That infant lips can try:  
Prayer the sublimest strains that reach  
The Majesty on high.

O Thou, by whom we come to God;  
The life, the truth, the way:  
The path of prayer Thyself hast trod:  
Lord, teach us how to pray.  
James Montgomery, 1771-1854

Compassion Cleansing  
And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will: be thou clean (Mark 1:41).

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Lepers were the most pitiable beggars in Palestine. Their disease separated them from family and friends, robbed them of employment, and made them forfeit everything of value. Banished to a life of despair and loneliness, they were dependent on relatives to bring food and could only hope a premature death would terminate their sufferings. It was never revealed where this leper lived nor how he heard of the approach of Jesus, but evidently he had been stirred by the possibility of cleansing. He left wherever he was and, drawing near to the Lord, begged for assistance. His faith in the ability of Christ never wavered, but he was not sure Jesus would be willing to grant the favor. He said, "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." Defying the teachings and beliefs of the nation, the Lord touched the suppliant, which was forbidden by law.

Jesus was filled with compassion when He saw a person who was waiting to die, a derelict without a friend, a pauper without money. He knew what man was meant to be, and when He saw the extent of the tragedy before Him, he was "moved with compassion." This was not necessary. His word would have been sufficient to banish the disease. Even the leper could hardly believe his eyes. He could not remember when he had last been touched by anyone. Jesus was not only a great healer, He was a fearless friend. At first the man could hardly believe what had happened, but when Christ commanded him to go to the priest, it was evident a miracle had been performed. In spite of the command to be silent, the fellow was so exuberant he began to tell everybody about the transformation in his life, it is difficult to condemn his actions, for had we been in a similar position, we also might have acted unwisely. The cleansed leper would have appreciated the hymn:

He touched me, O, He touched me,  
And O, the joy that floods my soul:  
Something happened, and now I know,  
He touched me and made me whole.

Compassion Conquering

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Jesus . . . saith unto him, Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and bath had compassion on thee (Mark 5:19).

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The account of the Savior's visit to Gadara is strangely interesting, for He knew the people would be antagonistic. Scared they might suffer additional financial losses, the men asked Him to leave the area before further damage was done. The disciples might have considered the journey to have been a waste of precious time, but the Lord accomplished what He came to do. He delivered a soul from the bondage of Satan. and that man was soon to become the bearer of good tidings to an entire community. There is reason to believe that Jesus deliberately made the journey to meet the demoniac who lived among the tombs. Elsewhere the Lord ministered to multitudes of people. In the cemetery at Gadara. he spoke to one, or two demoniacs (see Matt. 8:28). but that fact teaches how He evaluated the worth of a man. The Savior believed the reclamation of one soul was more to be desired than any material gain possible to human beings.

It is interesting that Jesus made that journey to meet the need of a demoniac. Would it not have been more rewarding to deliver hundreds of sick folk at great meetings in Capernaum? It is the desire of God that all men should hear the good news of salvation. If people cannot come to Him, He will go to them. He loved those unfortunate men, and His amazing power liberated them from the bondage of evil. Had He opposed the attitude of His critics, an altercation might have arisen which would have left scars upon the conscience of the community. Wisely, Jesus instructed His convert to return to the village and testify concerning the compassion shown to him. He knew the man would be faithful to his commission. It is stimulating to remember the power of the Savior was equal to any and every challenge. Many years have passed since that memorable moment on the hillside of Gadara, but the ability of the Lord has never diminished.

#### Compassion Comforting

And 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 (Luke 7:11-13).

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This poor woman probably wished she were dead! Her husband had died leaving her to care for her child. and now her son had died. Why had God permitted this to happen? Why had He not completed His work by taking her? She was beyond words and tears. The time for the hastily arranged funeral had arrived. She was expected to follow her boy to his last resting place. The sad event had aroused the sympathy of the entire city. and while funerals were generally attended by only family and neighbors. this one was different. "Much people of the city was with her." Sadly. with bowed head and aching heart, she followed the bier down the narrow street.

Then suddenly the procession came to a halt. Something had stopped the progress of the mourners. A Stranger had interfered. The men carrying the body were motionless. Who was this Man,

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and by what authority had He halted the funeral march? The distressed mother looked up and saw the Stranger gazing intently at her, and then a mystical warmth began to remove the chill from her soul.

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 the corpse] 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 [Jesus] delivered him to his mother. And there came a fear on all: and they glorified God. saying. That a great prophet is risen up among us; that God hath visited his people (Luke 7:13-16).

Perhaps the Savior thought of His own mother when he saw the woman who had twice been bereaved. This was His only recorded visit to Nain, and He arrived at the exact moment when the funeral was passing through the gate. Had Jesus been a few minutes earlier or later, He could have missed that funeral. His timing was perfect—it always is!

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