The Compassion of the Lord Jesus

Which "Christ" do we follow?

The Lord Jesus prophesied, ***"False Christ's will arise"***. (Mt. 24:24) This has been so over the centuries with religious fakes advancing great claims for themselves and psychotics saying, "I am Jesus". Then there have also been many misrepresentations of the Lord Jesus – caricatures that depict Him as a fiery militant zealot, a failed superstar or even a circus clown. Coming closer to home there are our own distorted images of the Lord Jesus.

"Follow me", he said. "Yes Lord" comes our rather glib reply, "I will follow you". But which "Jesus" are we following? There is a "Jesus" some follow who breathes love but never judgement; brings comfort but never challenge. Others among us are alert to His commission to evangelise the lost but have missed completely His call to care for the poor, the sick, the hungry and the deprived.

The apostle Peter said we are to ***"imitate Him"*** and we are to ***"follow in His steps"*** (1 Pet. 2:21). So what we do depends on our understanding of the Lord Jesus in whose shoes we are to walk. It is always necessary to look again at the real Lord Jesus – the authentic Lord Jesus of the Gospels over against popular dreams of what we wish He was like. Why? Our lifestyle depends on the kind of Messiah we envisage and believe in.

The Example of the Lord Jesus

In his message in the household of Cornelius, Peter summed up the ministry of the Lord Jesus with the words, ***"He went about doing good".*** (Acts 10:38) What a beautiful summary! What a challenge for us! The Lord Jesus never harmed anyone. To every person and in every circumstance He did positive good.

Matthew tells us He, ***"Went about all the cities and villages teaching in their synagogues, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity".*** (Mt. 9:35) This was the balance in the public ministry of the Lord Jesus. He announced that the reign of God had begun and summoned all people to repent and believe the Good News. But to His preaching He added teaching for He was concerned for the transformation of people's minds. He wanted them to understand the characteristics of God's rule, the principles of the growth of the Kingdom and the conditions of entering His Kingdom.

But completely at one with the preaching/teaching of the Lord Jesus was a demonstration of Kingdom life. He healed the sick, fed the hungry and comforted the sad. He even performed the lowly service of a slave when He took water and a towel and washed the apostles' feet.

But in taking time to do this wasn't he wasting time? Wasn't the task of evangelism so urgent, with so many villages to visit and so few months to go? Why didn't He concentrate on this task and leave the problems of material welfare to others? The Lord Jesus evidently did not think so! Why? Clearly He thought His words and His works constituted a single ministry. His works were the "signs" of the Kingdom. He was announcing and describing the Kingdom. He said, ***"If it is by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you"***. (Lk. 11:20)

Yet the 'good works' of the Lord Jesus are not to be understood only as evidences of the arrival of God's reign and consequently the decline of the devil's dominion.

Compassion

The works of the Lord Jesus are described in the Gospel records as a result of His compassion. This was the supreme motive behind His service. He was very deeply moved by the sight of human need. He was moved with compassion and therefore moved into action! I will give some examples and you will see that a pattern quickly emerges. In almost every case it is a physical condition that arouses the concern of the Lord Jesus.

- **Leprosy and the resulting alienation** (Mk. 1:40-41)

A leprosy sufferer came and knelt down and begged the Lord Jesus to heal him. Today leprosy is called Hansen's disease. It is a bacterial infection. Those suffering with this disease suffered more than the loss of nerve sensation and disfigurement. They were excluded from society. No one could go near them or touch them. ***"Moved with compassion, He*** (the Lord Jesus) ***stretched out His hand and touched him and said to him, 'I will; be clean' ".*** (Mt. 8:2-4)

Mother Teresa once said, "There is more alienation in the West than there is in the East through disease."

- **Bereavement**

Just outside the town of Nain the Lord Jesus met the funeral procession of a young man – the only son of his widowed mother. Living in the Muslim World you know the deep tragedy in the future life of this woman and the despair and hopelessness she was experiencing. ***"And when the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, 'do not weep' … and He said, 'young man, I say to you arise.' "*** (Lk 7:11-17)

- **Crowds of people**

"When He saw the crowds, He had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." (Mt. 9:36) Mk. 6:34 adds, ***"And He began to teach them many things."*** Sheep without a shepherd are prey to wolves, to theft and to accidents. Collectively sheep are surprisingly stupid and easily get themselves into difficult places.

- **The sick**

"As He went ashore, He saw a great throng and He had compassion on them and healed their sick." (Mt. 14:14)

- **The hungry**

"I have compassion on the crowd, because they have been with Me now three days and have nothing to eat and if I send them away hungry to their homes they will faint on the way and some of them have come a long way." (Mk. 8:2-3 and Mt. 15:32)

So whether it was a crowd or an individual, the sequence was the same. First He "saw". True love is always observant and the eyes of the Lord Jesus never missed the sight of a need. Nobody could accuse Him of being like the priest and the Levite in the story of the Good Samaritan. Of both of these men it is written, ***"He saw him"***. Yet each 'saw him' <u>without seeing</u>, for he looked the other way and so ***"passed by on the other side"***. (Lk. 10:31) On the other hand, the Lord Jesus truly "saw". He was not afraid to look human need in the face in all its ugly reality. What He saw invariably moved Him to compassion and this led to compassionate action. His compassion never dissipated itself in words. It found expression in deeds. He saw, He felt and He acted. This movement from the eye to the heart and from the heart to the hand led to constructive action.

The logic of compassion is reinforced by John, ***"This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity (closes his heart) on them, how can the love of God be in that person? Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth"***. (1 Jn. 3:16-18)

These verses are introduced by the statement that it is by self-sacrifice on the part of the Lord Jesus that ***"we know what love is"***. John meant that the world would never have known the true meaning of love if it had not been for the death of the Lord Jesus on the Cross! Is this a ridiculous statement? Some would say, "Everybody knows the meaning of love. It is self-evident! We don't need Jesus to teach us". But I don't think John would have shifted from his position through critics like these. All human love falls short of love's ideal. Much of it is great and noble, but sadly all of it is tainted to

some degree by ulterior motives and it is a mixture of selfishness and unselfishness. Only one act of pure, unselfish, undiluted love has ever been performed in all the long history of mankind and that was the self-giving of the Lord Jesus on the Cross. There He loved with perfect love. He gave everything – His whole being – for those who deserved nothing – people like us!

So what is love? It is sacrificial service – not sentiments – giving ourselves to serve others. John continues, ***"And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters"***. The word ***"brothers and sisters"*** means more than just "believers". It is used to imply all people. This might be a spectacular deed of heroism, but it is usually unspectacular deeds of service. The only way we can ***"lay down our lives"*** is when we give them freely in the service of others. If there is no serving, there is no love.

John then applies this principle to the more affluent believer. Such a person has two characteristics. Firstly he ***"has material possessions"*** and secondly he ***"sees a brother or sister in need"***. He sees the need and has the wherewithal to meet it. He sees sickness and has the medicine; he sees ignorance and has knowledge; he sees hunger and has food; he sees poverty and has money; he sees a lack of technical know-how and has technical skills. The question is whether he will relate what he has to what he sees or whether he will keep them far apart.

We know what the Lord Jesus did: He saw – He felt compassion – He acted. What about us? If we don't apply what we have to what we see we are "closing our hearts". If we do this John asks the question, ***"How does God's love abide in us?"*** It doesn't! It cannot! For God's love is service. So if His love is truly within us, it is bound to break out in positive action in relating what we have to what we see.

John ends his appeal to us to be sure our love expresses itself not ***"with words or speech but with actions and in truth"***. (v. 18)