

## The Compassionate Christ.

Text: Matt 8:14-17

Suggested Hymns:

530, 380, 452, 284, 161

1) See How Jesus Had Compassion  
When He Walked On This Earth

2) See How Christ Meets the Need  
For Compassion Today

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Matthew 8:14-17, <sup>14</sup> *Now when Jesus had come into Peter's house, He saw his wife's mother lying sick with a fever. <sup>15</sup> So He touched her hand, and the fever left her. And she arose and served them.*

<sup>16</sup> *When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick, <sup>17</sup> that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: "He Himself took our infirmities And bore our sicknesses."* (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

How do you think of Christ? Do you think of Him as the fourth century theologians thought of Him — “God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God”?

Do you think of Him as the medieval artists portrayed Him, a stern judge sitting upon the rainbow with a lily protruding from one ear signifying the redeemed, and a sword symbolising the doom of the damned protruding from the other ear?

Do you think of Him as Bruce Barton described Him in *“The Man Nobody Knows”* — a shrewd salesman, a hearty fellow well presented, the most popular dinner guest in Jerusalem?

Do you think of Him as He is often described — impractical dreamer, poet of Galilee, and religious reformer?

There are many ways in which people think of Christ, for Christ is many things to many people — teacher, judge, friend, example, and redeemer.

However, there is one attribute of Jesus that appeals to more people than any other, and that is His boundless capacity for compassion. From the beginning of His ministry to its close on Calvary, He was always thinking of others in a spirit of sympathy. Because of the inroads of sin upon human life, there is no generation, no nation, which does not need to feel the compassion of Christ.

We boast of our advanced technology with its productiveness, its labour-saving machinery, its conquest of disease, and its progress along so many lines of endeavour.

Yet, you cannot place your finger on a single spot of the earth's surface where there are people living where there is no need of compassion. There are refugees from many lands without hope of ever resuming normal living again.

There are the victims of political systems who have been made slaves of a materialistic outlook on life. There are the coloured races of Asia and Africa who have been objects of the white man's exploitation, or victims of their own pagan religions.

There are those caught in the toils of some degrading evil. There are others who are desperately lonely, terribly frightened, or grievously disillusioned with life. Others are sick, unemployed, and bereaved.

One doesn't have to go beyond his own town, sometimes not even outside of his own family, to find a soul who stands in need of compassion.

It is this need for compassion that Christ meets today, as He always met it. Our theme for today is, "*The Compassionate Christ.*" May the Lord bless our meditation.

### **1. See How Jesus Had Compassion When He Walked This Earth.**

Just like the Gospel lesson<sup>1</sup> for today, we have before us a passage which describes Christ's compassion. Jesus was going to the home of Peter. As far as we know, Peter was the only one of the apostles who was married, and we can probably assume that Jesus was a frequent guest in Peter's home.

On this occasion, Peter's mother-in-law was lying sick with fever. Fever can take many forms, but often it is marked by great discomfort, intense thirst, and

delirium. Luke 4:38 informs us that it was a *high fever*. Seeing the sick woman, Jesus was moved with compassion.

We are told that He touched her hand, and the fever left her. Peter's mother-in-law got out of bed immediately and waited on Jesus. This was a wonderful miraculous healing.

Immediately, the word got around the city that Jesus had healed Peter's mother-in-law. It was not long before a strange crowd was gathered at the door of Peter's home — demon-possessed people, lepers, lame, deaf, blind, and paralytics. In compassion, Jesus drove out all the evil spirits and healed all the sick people.

Earlier that same day, in the same city, Jesus had healed the paralysed servant of a centurion. According to Mark's account of the incident, and Luke's also, all this took place on the Sabbath.<sup>2</sup>

The evangelist, in recording the incident, could not but be reminded of what the Book of Isaiah said of the Messiah who was to come, "*He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.*"<sup>3</sup> To the evangelist, the expressions of Christ's compassion on this day were proof that Jesus was the long-looked-for Messiah.

That busy day was only the beginning of a long and active ministry of compassion. When great crowds of people listened all day to Jesus' preaching, and had a long journey home without food to strengthen them on the way, Jesus had compassion on them, and fed them.

When He was entering the city of Nain one day, He met a funeral procession coming out of the city. A widow was burying her only son. Jesus had compassion on her and restored the boy to life again.

One day, while worshipping in the Temple, there was brought to Him a man born blind. People wanted to argue about whose sin had caused the man's blindness, but Jesus felt there was something more important to do than argue. In compassion, He healed the man.

On another occasion, as He was entering the city of Jericho, He was met by a blind beggar. Again, the compassion of Christ prompted Him to heal the man.

How the heart of Jesus must have bled for the miserable people of His day, the lepers, who, because of the loathsome nature of their disease, were outcasts from society! Once He healed ten lepers by the power of His spoken word.

On another occasion, when Jesus was preaching in the region of Decapolis on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee, a deaf-mute was brought to Him. What a calamity it is for a person to be out of communication with his fellow men! We do not wonder that Jesus had compassion on him. This time, by the power of His touch, He healed that deaf-mute.

And so it went. An endless stream of demon possessed, paralytics, lepers, blind, lame, and fevered felt the strength of Christ's compassion and received the wholeness of life He was able to give them.

Nor was the compassion of Christ limited to the bodies of men. When a woman taken in a grievous sin was brought to Him, He had compassion on her, forgave her, and told her, "***Go and sin no more.***"<sup>4</sup>

On his last entrance into the city of Jerusalem, Jesus paused at the brow of the hill overlooking the city and broke into tears. With pathos in His voice that we can never know, He said, "***If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace!***"<sup>5</sup>

He had compassion on the children which the adults tried to keep away from Him, saying, "***Let the children come to me and forbid them not.***"<sup>6</sup>

When a thief, crucified beside Him on Calvary, asked to be remembered when He came into His kingdom, Jesus said, "***Today, you will be with me in Paradise.***" Jesus' heart was torn by the ignorance, the unbelief, and the sin which He found all around Him.

In His parables, too, Christ's compassion was evident. Best known to all of us are the parables of the good Samaritan and the prodigal son. Take compassion out of those parables, and there is no meaning left.

Asked to read the Gospels and to describe in the least number of words the content of those Gospels, it would be hard to find a better answer than "***The Compassionate Christ.***"

The accounts of Jesus' life in all four Gospels impress upon us that Jesus never turned anybody away who came or was brought to him to be healed. Some

Bible commentators have suggested that the land of Israel was virtually free of illness and demon possession during the years of Jesus' ministry since Jesus never turned anyone away. This may be an exaggeration, but it is certain that Jesus' reputation as a healer spread throughout the land of Israel and beyond.

All the miracles of healing Jesus performed identified Him, not just as a great prophet of the Lord, but as the promised Messiah.

## **2. See How Christ Meets the Need For Compassion Today.**

It is because our Lord ministered in love to the souls and bodies of men, and because He opened men's minds and hearts to the duty and beauty of compassion, that where ever Christianity has gone there has arisen a ministry of mercy to the multitude of needs of mankind — Bibles for the unsaved, hospitals for the sick, orphanages for unwanted children, havens of refuge for the aged, institutions of mercy for the afflicted in mind and body, charities supplying food and clothing, and medicine to the wretched millions of the earth.

People who come into contact with Jesus usually catch something of His spirit of compassion. Long years after Peter had witnessed Christ's healing of his mother-in-law, as well as many other miracles of Christ's compassion, he urged upon the readers in one of his letters that they have sympathy, love of the brethren, and a tender heart.

We read in 1 Peter 1:22–23, <sup>22</sup> *Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart,* <sup>23</sup> *having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever.*

Dr. Frank Laubach wrote a book entitled *The World Is Learning Compassion*. Many people would say that the title is too optimistic, but few would deny that we must change the world from an economy of scarcity to an economy of plenty. Such a change can be effected not by politics or science or education, however much they may contribute, but by the awakening of a new spirit of unselfishness and compassion in the hearts of men and women everywhere.

Science and education may give us the techniques by which an economy of plenty is possible for the peoples of the world, but only a right religion will be able to apply those techniques intelligently. The call of Christ is a call to sympathetic service.

Where people are saved, they are interested in saving others, and because of this interest the Church of Christ will always be concerned with works of mercy.

The time will come when our earthly period of grace is ended, when we shall stand before the eternal throne of Christ as He gives the verdict upon men's lives.

Not what men said they believed, not what honour the Church may have conferred upon them, not what display of piety they made in their lives will be the basis of that verdict, but faith working through love.

Let us all have compassion after the fashion of Christ's own compassion.

God grant that on that day we may be among those who hear the blessed words, as written in Matthew 25:34–36, <sup>34</sup> *Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: <sup>35</sup> for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; <sup>36</sup> I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.'*

So looking at Christ's compassion, let us close with the words of the hymnist,<sup>7</sup>

O bless the Lord, my soul:  
Nor let His mercies lie  
Forgotten in unthankfulness,  
And without praises die.

'Tis He forgives thy sins:  
'Tis He relieves thy pain:  
'Tis He that heals thy sicknesses  
And gives thee strength again. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Mathew 8:1-13

<sup>2</sup> Mark 1:29, Luke 4:38

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 8:17, Isa. 53:4

<sup>4</sup> John 8:11

<sup>5</sup> Luke 19:42

<sup>6</sup> Luke 18:17

<sup>7</sup> Hymn 452 v 2 & 3