A Christlike Compassion
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When I was a teen-ager I had Sunday school teacher that asked us to read the book *In His Steps* by Charles Sheldon. I remember reading the book with fascination. I decided that I was going to try to follow the admonition in the book to always ask the question before making a decision: "What would Jesus do?" It became rather frustrating to me because as a thirteen year old I really didn't know. In fact there are many today that, if asked that question, would be hard pressed to render anything other than a guess. Yet, is it not true that it is the ministry of the Holy Spirit to help us to be Christ like? Does that not mean that we should be taught to think and act like "little Christs?" Is that not what the word "Christian" means?

We do not become Christlike without real change being a part of the Spirit's sanctifying ministry in our lives. Naturally, we are self centered and filled with fear that somehow we are not going to be happy, contented and fulfilled. It is the nature of the human being to try to gain these things through our self effort and activities. All this is just opposite of the way that the Holy Spirit uses to make us Christlike.

When God put together the revelation of His power he used the wonder of His creation to communicate it to men. Romans 1:18-23 clearly states that His majesty and glory are seen though the things that He made. Creation shouts forth His eternal power and might. However, when He began to reveal His plan, especially of redemption, He chose men to men to deliver His message. Second Peter 1:21 tells us "for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." God's great plan of redemption and reconciliation is carefully and progressively inscripturated. Then, as Hebrews 1:1 tells us, "God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken unto us in His Son. ..." After all, when it is all said and done, the substance of the power and plan of God is seen in His person and, according to what Hebrews 1:3 says of Jesus Christ "He is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature..." If we would know how to be godly we must "fix our eyes on him who is the author and perfector of faith" (Hebrews 12:2).

It is the goal of this issue to help us to understand how a godly life will endeavor to be Christlike in understanding and ministering to those who are physically, emotionally and mentally challenged. The compassion that was so much a part of the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus is not natural to the human spirit. True biblical compassion is never self serving nor embarked upon to make one "feel" better about himself. It is a genuine characteristic of the spiritual revolution that is generated by the ministry of the Holy Spirit as He changes us into the image of God's dear Son. Let's examine some of the instances in the Life of Christ to see if we can understand how that compassion manifested itself and what changes are necessary in us if we are going to reflect the life of Christ.

Although there is a record of the healing ministry of the Lord Jesus in the early chapters of Matthew, we first come across the empathetic spirit of the Lord expressed in the word "compassion" in Matthew 9:36. In His ministry He is going into all of the villages and towns in the region of Galilee. He interacts with people in teaching in their synagogues and announcing to them the Gospel that offers deliverance to them now. He sees their confusion. He understands their hopelessness. He reaches out to them by meeting their physical needs through healing, but perceives how spiritually helpless they are. His response is a heartfelt compassion. He is moved by their plight and calls his disciples around him and challenges them to "plead" with God that He would "compel" men to work with these needy people. The prayer here is to plead with God that He would create the same compassion in the hearts of men that the Lord Jesus had for these
people. If we are to be Christlike we must plead with God that we would see people as He sees them with compassion being the result.

There are a number of other illustrations where Jesus perceives the tremendous need of people with the result that His compassion for them overflows. When His heart was tender after hearing of the death of John the Baptist, Matthew 14:14 tells us that He got off by himself. The multitudes followed him and when He came out to them He looked on them with great understanding and compassion with the result that He reached out to them and healed their sick. On another occasion after people had been in the wilderness with Him for three days, He observed to the disciples, I cannot send them away hungry so His compassion led Him to take the seven loaves and a few fish and meet their need. The miracle was not the focus of His heart, it was the people who had no food.

Compassion caused Him to stop in Jericho when the two blind men called out to him. Those who could see regarded their cries as a nuisance. They were familiar with these blind beggars and their hearts were cold toward their life in darkness. But Jesus understood, His heart was heavy because of their plight. He was moved with compassion and reached out to them, opening their eyes. One day outside of the village of Nain, Jesus met a funeral procession. A widow had lost her only son. They were carrying him to be buried. She was now alone. Through her tear filled eyes she met the Lord Jesus. He looked into her heart and saw the hurt and loneliness. He could not walk away but he was moved with compassion and imparted life to her son. The observation of those in the funeral procession was "God has visited His people."

I cannot help but think that compassion was one of the deepest emotions in the heart of the Son of God as He walked among us. If we are to "follow in His steps" as Peter instructs us we cannot observe halt, the maimed, the deaf, the blind and the emotionally and mentally challenged without having the heart of compassion that characterized the Lord.

God help us to weep and to reach out as did Jesus!