

The Shepherd's Heart

A compassionate heart

In his classic and popular hymn, "Love divine," Charles Wesley declares the glorious truth, "Jesus, Thou art all compassion." As he pondered the loving heart of Christ, this came to the very forefront of his mind. This wasn't something he made up out of poetic licence. No, the bible tells us clearly that this is so. Jesus, our shepherd, has a heart of compassion.

The Greek word for compassion is a magnificent word – especially if we spell it out in English letters. Get your tongue around this - Splanchnizomai! It is such an expressive word, for it speaks concerning being moved in one's innards. It is as if the whole of the insides are churned up as the person yearns with compassion for another. This is the heart of our shepherd. Jesus is bursting with compassion for others, so that He gives His all to meet their needs.

Just two examples will help us to see the compassionate nature of our shepherd.

Compassion in preaching

Imagine the scene. Stretching out before you are beautiful green hills. The sun is shining, the colours are vibrant, and in the foreground, you see a flock of sheep. All seems well until you spot a rogue wolf, without a shepherd in sight.

This was the view Jesus had one day as He went about preaching and teaching in the synagogues of the villages and cities of Galilee. As he viewed the multitude before Him, He saw that they were sheep in danger. They had no one to shepherd them. No one to care for and protect them. Their situation was desperate. When confronted with this scene, we read of His reaction in Matthew 9v36, "*But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.*"

He saw them with a true shepherd's eyes, and with a compassionate heart. They needed someone to lead them. They needed Him, and they needed His nourishing and protecting word. That is what he brought to them. Jesus taught them the gospel, the good news of His Kingdom. He revealed to them the truth of salvation and actually came to accomplish that salvation.

However, in His compassion Jesus didn't just meet the immediate need of the people before Him. He looked to the wider needs of others, and of future generations. For Jesus said to His disciples, "*The harvest truly is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest*" (Matthew 9v27-38). Jesus knew that others needed to take this message in compassion to the people, so He calls His disciples to pray and later to go.

Jesus with compassion sees the need that His sheep have for preaching. Through preaching He feeds and nourishes them. He brings them beside the still waters. He causes them to feed on the green pastures. Therefore, He gives to the church the gift of preachers. These are the pastors he sends to minister His word, to a needy people. In Ephesians 4v11, we read that the ascended Christ, *“Gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints....”* This is the provision of a shepherd full of compassion. He would not have us be weary and scattered, but suitably looked after. Praise God that He gives us preachers who feed us His word.

Compassion in meeting our needs

Let us now change the scene radically. We now have a funeral procession making its way through the City of Nain. There is a large crowd, but the focus is on a widow mourning the loss of her only son. She is distraught and destitute. Her state is hopeless. All people can do is mourn with her.

What is Jesus’ reaction as He comes upon this scene? *‘When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her and said to her, “Do not weep.”’* We then read of His astonishing raising of her son from the dead. Jesus was moved with compassion to help this woman and Jesus had the power to make a difference. He met her needs.

Jesus is such a shepherd to us. As sheep we all have different needs. They come in various shapes, sizes and degrees. However, Jesus looks upon us, is moved with compassion and meets those needs out of His glorious riches. No matter what part of the journey we are on. Whether we are in relative calm, facing enemies or even the last enemy death, we can be sure that His compassion provides the goodness and mercy that we really need. All through our lives this goodness and mercy will follow us until we take our place in glory. What a compassionate shepherd. How He is moved within His inmost being to help His dear sheep. What comfort this brings to us.

Praying to our shepherd

Let us then pray to our shepherd with full assurance of faith. Let us pray as He urges us to, that the sheep may be provided with shepherds to feed the flock His word. Let us also pray that out of His compassion he will meet our needs, and the needs of our fellow sheep around us.