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## Exhortation

# "Let this mind be in you . . ."

## 4. "He was moved with compassion"

Jim Wood

**I**T IS THE writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews who, in commenting upon the nature of our "great high priest", made it clear that he could be "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Heb. 4:14,15). The infirmities of which he writes appear to be those desires which, if given in to, would cause us to sin, because the verse continues: ". . . but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin". So Jesus is able to sympathise because he appreciates the strength of will that is necessary if sin is to be suppressed. He is compassionate towards those engaged in the continual struggle with temptation.

Jesus came primarily not to make this present life better, but to make the life to come attainable. His purpose was not, at that time, to eradicate illness and disease from the world, but to overcome sin and its consequences. However, we are susceptible to both physical and spiritual ailment. The former, its incidence and consequence, are clearly obvious to all affected, and we are conscious of its effects; but for the latter this is not always so. Therefore, his healing of the familiar physical is used to teach about the sometimes neglected spiritual.

When a leper came to him, Jesus was "moved with compassion", and he "put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him . . . be thou clean" (Mk. 1:41). In his compassion for the leper (whose ailment was one which no man could cure, and which barred him from society) is seen his compassion for man afflicted by sin, which no other man could heal, and which would result in his being excluded from the Kingdom. Jesus came to call "sinners to repentance" (2:17), to "save his people from their sins" (Mt. 1:21).

On another occasion two blind men appealed to him, "saying, Have mercy on us, O Lord, thou Son of David". Jesus said, "What will ye that I shall do unto you? They say unto him, Lord, that our eyes may be opened. So Jesus had compassion on them" (Mt. 20:30,32-34). Spiritual blindness prevents the panorama of God's plan being

visualised. The path to tread is not clearly seen and the gospel is unrecognised. So he read in "the book of the prophet Esaias . . . The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; He hath sent me . . . to preach . . . recovering of sight to the blind" (Lk. 4:17,18). He came to have compassion on the spiritually blind, and highlighted this in his healing of the physically blind.

His compassion was also shown towards those suffering because, in remaining with him for three days, they had neglected their physical needs. He said of them: "I have compassion on the multitude, because they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat" (Mk. 8:2). In providing to satisfy their physical needs in the way he did, he was showing that, as "that bread which came down from heaven", he was the only one who could adequately satisfy their hungering after righteousness and provide the means so that they could "live for ever" (Jno. 6:58).

On an earlier occasion, when he "saw much people", he "was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd". That compassion moved him, not to stand as political leader, not to rally them to arms, not to promote himself as activist to agitate for better conditions, but "to teach them many things" (Mk. 6:34), the things concerning himself and the Kingdom to come.

Surely the Lord was moved by sad cases of poverty, abuse and physical affliction, but when the New Testament speaks of his compassion it is compassion aroused because he is primarily concerned with people's eternal salvation.

We too cannot help but be affected by the deprivation, injustice and inequality suffered by others, and we respond as our means and our consciences allow. But if we "let this mind be in [us], which was also in Christ Jesus", our primary desire will be to act as ministers of the gospel.