

The Lord's looks. Luke 22.60-61 Spanish Wells. May/June 2003

The gospels have much to say about the occasions when Jesus noticed, saw and looked at people. It was enough for our wonderful Lord to see their need. This was sufficient in itself to draw out His feelings of compassion and love.

Sometimes it was true of **crowds** – whether concerning their physical or spiritual needs. Matthew and Mark introduce the feeding of the 5000 with the same expression: 'went forth and saw a great multitude and moved with compassion on them', Matt. 14. 14; Mark 6. 34. Matthew then adds 'and healed the sick' (and fed them). Mark then adds 'because they were as sheep having no shepherd, He began to teach them many things'.

But though He looked with a kindly eye on the crowds, we read more often about His reaction to **individuals** – when the needs He saw moved His great heart of love and triggered various acts of kindness. His compassion was expressed in many ways.

For example, it was expressed in that **some received the benefit of His power**. Consider Him at a city gate, in a synagogue, and by a pool in Jerusalem.

At the city gate of Nain – a dead man was being carried out for burial – he was the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. All she had in the world was in the box. There were a lot of people present – there was a great crowd with Him and a considerable crowd with her. But '**when the Lord saw her**, He was moved with compassion on her and said, Do not weep', Luke 7. 13. His great heart throbbed with compassion for the lady and He touched the bier – the structure which carried the open coffin – and said, 'Young man, I say to you arise'. When the young man sat up and spoke, Jesus gave him to his mother ...and 'all glorified God, saying, A great prophet has risen up among us, and, God has visited His people'.

See Him in the synagogue in Luke 13. There was a woman with a 'spirit of infirmity' – who had been bent double 18 years – unable to straighten herself fully. She had shuffled her way that day to the synagogue to take her place in the separate section to the men. '**When Jesus saw her**, He called her to Him and said, Woman, you will be loosed from your infirmity'. He laid His hands on her and immediately she was made straight. She glorified God – one of seven cases in gospel of Luke (ranging from the shepherds in chapter 2 to the centurion of chapter 23). She could look up for the first time for 18 years. But the ruler of the synagogue didn't glorify God – he was angry, indignant! For it was the Sabbath! He didn't address Jesus but preached a sermon to the congregation - 'There are six days on which men ought to work; come on them therefore and be healed, not on the sabbath day'. Lord responded, 'Hypocrites (for others were clearly behind the ruler; he was representative of others, does not each of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the manger and lead it away to give it drink. So ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham (indicating her faith in God and her genuine piety), whom Satan has bound, behold (lo, look, think of it), ten and eight years (not '18') be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?' (Literal translation.)

Then think of the man ill at the pool of Bethesda – with its five porches – in John 5. It was another Sabbath. The man had been sick for 38 years. '**When Jesus saw him lying there**, and knowing he had been in that condition for a long time, said to him, Do you want to be made well (whole)?' Jesus knew that He had been still in heaven when the man had been taken ill. It may seem an odd question, but quite clearly the man had by now lost all hope – having suffered repeated disappointment: 'I have no man ...'. But our Lord's question contained a promise of help. Jesus knew all about the man but the man knew nothing of Jesus. The Jews objected, 'It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your mattress'. 'Who told you to take up your mattress?' And the man did not even know His name! But just like the Saviour, He met the need and then moved on – withdrawing Himself and blending into the crowd. He did not wait for any credit, praise or recognition.

His compassion was expressed also in that some **received the benefit of His sympathy**. Think of Mary of Bethany. '**When Jesus saw her weeping** and the Jews which came with her weeping, He groaned (was deeply moved) in spirit and was troubled', John 11. 33. Many Jews had come to comfort and console Mary and her sister. They had followed Mary when Martha summoned: 'The teacher has come and calls for you', because they thought she had gone to tomb to weep. She fell at His feet; 'If you had been here my brother would not have died', she said, seemingly implying a measure of criticism. But He shared her grief and sorrow. He stood alongside. Though He knew that He was resurrection and life, and that He was poised to raise her brother from the dead, He wept profusely. And His tears led the Jews to acknowledge, 'See how He loved him (Lazarus)'. But His tears tell us that He loved Mary and them too.

His compassion was expressed also in that some **received the benefit of His care and thoughtfulness**. Some instances are all too easy to miss. Consider what happened at Caesarea Philippi, when He 'began to teach openly that He must suffer many things, be rejected elders, chief priests, scribes, and killed'. Peter then 'took Him aside (presumably that he might not be seen to reprove the Lord in front of others) and began to rebuke. When He **turned round and looked on** (literally 'seeing') the disciples, He rebuked Peter, Get behind me, Satan'. For the Lord knew

that the other disciples shared the very same aspirations, ambitions and hopes as Peter. And so, for their benefit and sake, a public rebuke was necessary.

His consideration and care shone even brighter for His mother at the cross. '**When he saw His mother** and the disciple He loved standing near, He said to His mother, Woman, behold your son'. Other women stood there – including Mary Magdalene and His aunt – but He had eyes for only one. He knew all she was going through – how her very love for Him compelled her to stand and watch Him (her firstborn son) suffer the humiliating and agonising death of crucifixion. He knew how the cruel nails had torn into her too – how the taunts and sneers of the rulers and people had stung her too – how, when they stripped Him of His garments, she had felt His shame too. When He said to Mary, 'Woman, behold your son', He was thinking of the past and was, in effect, saying His goodbye to her. When He said to John, 'Behold your mother', He was thinking of the future and was making provision for her.

His compassion was expressed also in that some **received the benefit of His protection** – when He sprang to defend and shield those under attack. Sometimes what He saw displeased Him. Take two cases recorded by Mark. First, in chapter 10. Following His teaching on marriage and divorce – when His disciples were horrified and taken aback, concluding that in such circumstances it was better not to marry at all – He had spoken of those who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of kingdom of heaven. His disciples completely misunderstood the point, and so, when fathers brought their young children for Him to touch them, the disciples were in no doubt that He would have no time for little children. Certain that he not want be bothered with them, His self-appointed bodyguard rebuked those who brought the children to Him. '**When Jesus saw** this, He was much (greatly) displeased (literally 'indignant' – the same word as is used of the ruler of the synagogue in Luke 13, which is the only other occasion when the word is used of Jesus) and said, Let the little children come to me, and do not prevent them, for of such is the kingdom of God'. He then folded them in His strong carpenter's arms.

At the end of chapter 3 we read how, at the house of Simon Peter, His 'brothers and mother stood outside, calling Him. When informed that they were outside seeking Him, He asked, Who is my mother and brother? And **looking around** at those sitting in circle, around Him, He said, Behold my mother and brother. Whoever does the will of God is my brother, sister and mother'. This then was a look with favour and approval. But at the beginning of chapter 3, He looked around with anything but favour and approval. He was in a synagogue and there stood before Him a man with a withered hand. Again it was the Sabbath day. According to Luke 6, the scribes and Pharisees watched Him carefully – on the lookout for some ground to accuse Him. They knew that He had previously defended the disciples when they were criticised for plucking ears of corn on the Sabbath. The scribes' and Pharisees' very looks announced loudly, 'Don't even think about doing something yourself'. But He took up the challenge - 'Is it lawful on the Sabbath day to do good or to do evil; to save life or to kill?' If you have the power and opportunity to good and do not, you have done evil. To stand by inactive leaves you responsible for the need which still exists. Even though the man's infirmity was not life threatening, all actions tend in one of two directions – at the one extreme to give life and at the other to take it. 'To him who knows ...', James 4. 17. The scribes and Pharisees were silent, refusing to answer. '**He looked round on them** in anger, being grieved greatly at the harshness of their heart, and He said to the man, Stretch out your hand'. He did and his hand was restored. And those eyes which earlier had swept around with favour and approval now blazed and glowed with anger.

And it is desperately important that we understand what it was made Him angry. For what made Jesus angry both in Mark 3 and Mark 10 certainly wasn't some petty injury done to Himself – not some personal insult as was once delivered by the Samaritan village in Luke 9, when He simply passed on to another village – but when others suffered hurt by being deprived of that which was for their good and blessing. It was love and compassion for the children and for the man with withered hand which provoked our Lord to indignation and anger.

And the same was true in chapter 11, when He cast out all that bought and sold in the temple. First, '**He looked around at all things**', and then went out to Bethany for the night. It was the next day that He overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold doves etc. He explained His actions in terms of Isaiah 56. 7 – 'Is it not written, my house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations; but you have made it a den (cavern) of thieves (robbers)', Mark 11.17. The court of the gentiles, which should have been available for prayer and the worship of the true God had become 'the bazaars of the sons of Annas'. Men came to pray and bring their offerings to God but were robbed and defrauded by a corrupt priesthood. That is, they were deprived of a place to pray – and so what Jesus saw caused Him out of compassion and love for others (as in chapters 3 and 10) to spring to the defence of those who were denied God's blessing.

We do not have the time to consider occasions when His compassion was expressed in that some **received the benefit of His straight speaking**. You may like to read the account of the rich young ruler in Mark 10 – when 'Jesus **looking at him** (looking straight at, directly, in face) loved him and said, One thing you lack, go sell what you have, and give to poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven and come, follow me'.

In each and in all of these cases, what the Lord Jesus saw moved Him to do something or to say something, or, at the very least, to feel something.

But on one occasion at least, His look stood by itself alone. For this time His look was His response to the situation. It was a wonderful moment when Peter **received the benefit of His look** at the end of Luke 22. We read that 'the Lord turned and **looked at Peter**, and Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said, Before the cock crows today, you shall deny me three times', Luke 22. 61.

At that moment, Jesus was being led out past the servants' fire – quite likely to spend a few hours in a cell before being brought back before the council the early morning for a formal hearing. According to Mark 14. 66, the courtyard with its fire was below the place where Jesus appeared before the council. The servants of the High Priest were poised to mock Him, to beat Him with their fists and to blindfold Him. And then He would be able to look at no-one! But for one brief moment, His eyes met those of Peter. And that single glance told Peter that Jesus knew *everything* – that Jesus had recognized both his face and his voice ... that Jesus had heard every word ... including Peter's dreadful oath!

For the Lord to have spoken just one syllable to Peter at that moment would have been for Jesus to betray Peter. For, under close questioning, Peter had maintained that he didn't know Jesus. The Lord could afford therefore to make no gesture of recognition. He wasn't able even to slacken His pace. But He did not need to. His one look said it all! Our Lord compressed everything He wanted to say into His look.

Perhaps His look reminded Simon Peter of the very first time they had met. Andrew, one of John the Baptist's disciples, had left the Baptist to follow the 'Lamb of God', John 1. 35-37. Andrew found his brother Simon and declared, 'We have found the Messiah ... and he brought him to Jesus. 'Looking at him, Jesus had said, You are Simon, the son of John. You shall be called Kephas (which means stone or rock)'.

And now Jesus looked at Peter again – but Peter certainly didn't feel much like a rock or stone now. Among other things, the Lord's look reminded him of his empty promises and protests of loyalty - 'I am ready to go to prison and to death with you', Luke 22. 33. What a joke! And our Lord's look reminded Peter, of course, of Jesus' own specific prediction about Peter's repeated denial before the cock would crow, Luke 22. 34.

But who can ever tell all that was in that look. Certainly it was not a flash of anger. A look of disappointment? Perhaps. Of pain? Almost certainly. But it was so much more.

For Jesus' love spoke from His eyes! His changeless and unbounded love spoke through His eyes. And, in the full knowledge of all that Peter had said and done, that single – that solitary – look said, 'Peter, I *still* love you ... and, Peter, I *always will*. And (who knows) just possibly it said as well, 'And Peter, I am still praying for you' – as in verse 32.

In that look, Peter read both his own forgiveness and his Lord's unquenchable love. That day, Jesus reached out with His look (as once He had with His hand to grasp a man then about to sink into the depths of the sea, Matt. 14. 30-31) to save that very same man from sinking into the depths of utter despair. What a wonderful, wonderful Saviour!¹

And today the Lord Jesus sees each of us. As Peter later put it, quoting from David's Psalm 34, 'The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous', 1 Pet. 3. 12.

And today He still extends :

- Power to help
- Sympathy in sorrow
- Consideration and care
- Protection for the weak
- Faithful words of rebuke spoken in love
- And, when we fail Him, His forgiveness ... assuring us of His utterly unchangeable love.

Footnote

¹ 'The prayer and the look had availed. The prayer had kept his faith from failing, but the look had broken his heart', J. G. Bellett, *Moral Glories*, page 53.