

THE GREATEST LOVE



"GREATER love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

Many beautiful stories have been written about self-sacrificing men who have displayed such great love as to die in their friend's stead; or bear the punishment that was meant for another. But Jesus showed an even greater love. He was willing to leave the realms of Glory to come to a sinful world, to people who He knew would not receive Him.

"[Jesus] made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men:

"And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the

cross" (Philippians 2:7, 8)

One time near the beginning of Christ's ministry, He went into a synagogue on the Sabbath Day in Nazareth, where He had been brought up. He opened the Book that was given to Him, and read:

"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 heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, "To preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18, 19).

When He then sat down, the eyes of the congregation were upon Him, wondering what those words meant. He told them: "This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears" (Luke 4:21). Those words had been prophesied many hundreds of years before, by the Prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 61:1, 2). Jesus, the One about whom Isaiah spoke, was now speaking to them; and His ministry on earth was to do good, But the evil conscience of these people was pricked, and they rose up, and thrust Him out of their city. In fact, they would have thrown him over a cliff; but He passed through the midst of them and went His way (Luke 4:29, 30).

"God is love" (I John 4:8), and in Jesus are the same characteristics as in the Father. "For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily" (Colossians 2:9).

It was the saying of an ancient philosopher that it is against every inclination of nature to love without being loved in return. Yet the great heart of Jesus was filled with compassion for those who turned from Him. He wept over Jerusalem, shortly before its religious rulers crucified Him:

"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matthew 23:37).

And Jesus could weep with heartfelt compassion with those who wept. When His friend Lazarus died, and the sisters were grieving over their loss, the Bible tells us, "Jesus wept" (John 11:35).

Jesus healed a demoniac, casting out of him a legion of devils, and giving the man power to live an upright, useful life again. But the citizens of his village asked Jesus to depart. His love was unreturned. Because He interfered with their unlawful business, they sent Him away.

At one time the Jews were very angry with Jesus, and began to pick up stones to stone Him. He asked, "Many good works have I shewed you from my Father; for which of those works do ye stone me?" (John 10:32). They answered: "For a good work we stone thee not; but for blasphemy; and because that thou, being a man, makest thyself God" (John 10: 33).

Jesus was God incarnate, "manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory" (I Timothy 3:16). This is the mystery of godliness.

Jesus told the Jews that He was doing things among them that no man could do.

"If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father.

"But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause" (John 15:24, 25).

Yet Jesus loved all men, even those who hated Him, and was willing to give His life as an atonement for our sin.

"God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8).

God's law states, "Without shedding of blood is no remission" for sin. There was no other blood good enough but the Blood of Jesus to atone for man's sins, so He must die. It was decreed from the foundation of the world that it must be so. But that did not excuse the men at whose hands He was crucified.

Jesus knew that the cross lay before Him, yet He could love mankind. All men have sinned, and deserve eternal death; but in Christ's great compassion, He was willing to take upon Himself man's sins, and die in his stead. (Read about His crucifixion, in the 19th chapter of John.) He was crucified — died for you and me. He was taken down from the cross and laid in a tomb. But He rose again! And then He ascended into Heaven and is now at the right hand of God the Father, a living Christ, interceding for us.

The Bible says: "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children;

"And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour" (Ephesians 5:1, 2).

Because Jesus loved the world and gave Himself a ransom for sin, we today have the opportunity to attain to eternal life through the Blood of His sacrifice.