

Lead me to the Cross Part 3: The Love of the Cross

Last week we looked extensively at what Jesus endured in the way of injustice, hostility, stress, agony, pain, suffering, rejection, torture and ultimately death for us. We know the answer to why the Cross? and why the shedding of the blood? Because life is in the blood and only the blood of Jesus could satisfy the debt of sin.

Today, we will answer the question, “Why would Jesus subject Himself to such inhumane treatment? And although the answer is very simple, it’s deeply profound: He loves us.

I believe we often interpret and measure God’s love for us based on what we believe He has either *done* for us in our lives, or what He *hasn’t* done for us, that we expected Him to. Sure, we’ll give a ‘wink and a nod’ to the fact that Jesus died for us, but where the rubber meets the road often in our lives, if we don’t out and out verbalize it, we internalize the statement, “God, if you *really* loved me, then You’ll do x, y and z.”

Something similar happened in Jesus’ day, when the Jewish people, the Nation of Israel and yes, even the religious leaders had a certain expectation on who the Messiah would be and what he would do for them. They thought their Messiah (Christ in the Greek; which means “Anointed One”) would come to be a conquering King, delivering them from Roman oppression and tyranny. Of course, as we have previously mentioned, Jesus didn’t come to become a conquering King, He came as the Sacrificial Lamb and the Suffering Servant.

When Jesus approached Jerusalem just before the Passover Celebration, the people were carrying Palm branches, laying their coats on the road before Jesus, who was riding in a procession and a throng of them were crying out “Hosanna! Hosanna!” which means in the Hebrew, “Help us God!” or “Save us God!” These same people just days later would be some of the crowd that would call for the release of the murderer Barabbas, and be calling for the execution of Jesus; Crucify Him!

Our *expectations* have a lot to do with our *interpretations*.

Maybe you have struggled at a time or three in your life to understand what was happening to you or going on around you and why those circumstances played out the way that they did. And in the midst of your suffering or someone else’s suffering, you lost faith or *some* of your trust, because your expectation of how God *should’ve and could’ve*, didn’t materialize.

In other words, back to “God, if you really loved me, then...” Perhaps you felt like God let you down, or maybe you felt betrayed or abandoned by God...? Or maybe you didn’t understand that we have to deal with pain in various forms, even as a Christian. Yes, we are promised that we will experience love, joy, peace, life abundantly and eventually eternal glory, but many times those are birthed through a painful process.

Come back with me to the Garden of Eden, and let’s look at what God tells Eve:

***“I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you will bring forth children.”
-Genesis 3:16 (Romans 8:18-23; emphasis mine)***

There has always been pain in the birthing process. God says here ***“...I will greatly multiply (or increase your pain).”*** God wanted to “birth” a family and He came down to take the greatest pain upon Himself. When we get ‘born again’ and birthed into God’s family, there is pain in that process, as well.

The Christian life is at times a ‘bed of roses’ (and it will certainly be in Heaven), but it also is at times a Crown of Thorns. C.S. Lewis said “Pain is God’s megaphone to a deaf world.” But for the believer, pain is a reminder that we have a Healer and a Comforter. Pain is also a transformer, that changes us into the image of His Son.

“For just as the sufferings of Christ are ours in abundance, so also our comfort is abundant through Christ.” -2nd Corinthians 1:5

The Apostle Paul declared, “...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead.” -Philippians 3:10, 11

The writer of Hebrews spoke of Jesus, “Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered.” -Hebrews 5:8

How many times do we pray for God to get us OUT of uncomfortable or painful circumstances, and not realize that many times God wants to get us THROUGH them! “Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.” Sometimes we have to walk through that valley in order to reach the green pastures, and the still waters... (**Psalm 23**)

Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego weren’t delivered *from* the fiery furnace... there was a 4th Man with them in the fire! (**Daniel 3**)

Daniel wasn’t delivered *out* of the Lion’s Den! (**Daniel 6**)

Regardless of our trials and tribulations, our struggles and our suffering, we need to know that God never wastes an opportunity. He causes all things to work for our good (**Romans 8:28**). Like we looked at extensively last week, He is a good Father who has our best interests and outcomes in heart.

“After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen and establish you.” -1st Peter 5:10

God loves us more than we can even fathom. Eye has not seen, ear has not heard, nor has mind conceived... we have only a taste, experientially of God’s love, but we will know one day, even as we are fully known:

“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” -Romans 8:18

The problem we face is that we cannot interpret God’s love clearly or correctly through our corrupted lens. Nor can we interpret it fully through our experiences or circumstances. There is only one way to correctly discern and know the love of God... through the Cross.

[SLIDE] *“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” -Romans 5:6-8*

“This is My commandment, that you love one another, just as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.” -John 15:12, 13

We looked last week at the depth of suffering, injustice, torture and the cruelest of deaths that Jesus willingly took upon Himself for our sake. Not to mention the weight of sin and the punishment for sin that he bore on our behalf while on that Cross.

If you have ever doubted God’s love, all you need to do is look to the Cross. You need to understand the highest display of love for *all time* was the Cross. There is no greater love that could possibly be shown or known. There is no “wondering” whether or not God loves us or God loves me. God loves you this much **[SLIDES: 3 PICTURES]**.

“For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” -Romans 8:38, 39

God the Father made a way, through the Cross and through His Son’s sacrificial death on that Cross for us to come to Him. If you are crying out “Hosanna” this morning; God help me! God save me! The doorway is the cross. It’s the great exchange: we give God our hurting, broken, messed up lives and He gives us life, deeper love, joy, peace, healing, and more than we could ever fathom or imagine.

God loves you no matter what you’ve done in your life. I’ve done some pretty horrible things, but there is forgiveness, there is cleansing, there is healing and there is transformation. There is nothing you can do to make God love you *less*, and there is nothing you can do that can make God love you *more*! Receive what Jesus did for you on the Cross today!

If you have never made Him Lord of your life, never made Him your Savior, never surrendered your life in exchange for His, today is your day.