

# The Love of the Cross (1 John 3: 16-18)

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## 1. The Love of the cross is sacrificial love (1 John 3:16-18)

This is the parallel scripture to John 3:16

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Many people in the world have a wrong concept of love. People think love is a some kind of fuzzy feeling or they equate it with romantic love. Some think of it as the love expressed between family members or friends. Some people think love is *being looked after or receiving or being filled with the things they lack*, – in other words, love is what they can get from other people. But real love is what we give to others. This is how the Bible defines love.

Love is to lay down one's life for others, and Jesus set the example for us. Jesus the almighty God, the creator of the whole universe laid down his life for us. The reason we can love is because we have received this great undeserved love of God. We have tasted what it means to have love – love freely given to us. It is not something we earned or worked for.

### **a) Sacrificial love will change the way we love (v17)**

After tasting this sacrificial love for ourselves, it is only natural for us to want to live out that love.

V17 If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?

It means once you encounter Jesus' love, you can't live any longer without giving love to others. Our life will be so impacted that the way we love will be totally changed.

### **b) Sacrificial love will cost us (v18)**

V18 Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.

Love is not just saying 'I love you', even though that is good. People need to see love in action. Just like the way Jesus left His place in heaven: He came to this sinful dirty world. Do you know how dirty this world is to God? It is like a rubbish dump and like sewage. He was born in a dirty manger – a real manger, not like the kind we sometimes think but one full of the smell and even the manure of horses and other animals. Why did he choose a manger? To show his humility, that he has come to this dirty sinful world.

He came as carpenter. Do you ever wonder why he came as a carpenter? I used to wonder why he came as carpenter? Why not a fisherman like Peter and Andrew, James and John? Why not a business man, with money to do a lot of good? Or a farmer, able to identify with most of the people of that time. No, instead he came as a carpenter.

Some people think he came as a carpenter because carpenters are builders and this is what God the Father wants us to understand about his Son—Jesus Christ is a builder, both in the natural and the supernatural, in the material and the spiritual. But I wonder if this is all it is.

When I was meditating, and praying about this sermon, a thought came to me. Is it possible that because every time Jesus touched the wood, it would speak to him of the cross, remind him of his purpose on earth? Every time he hit the nail with a hammer it would remind him of the pain and death he was to bear.

He was brought up as carpenter – a tough and rough life. He lived through the temptations of man and overcame them. He was mocked by people especially for claiming he was the Son of God. Of course his claim was true, but most people could not accept his claim. He was nailed on the cross for us.

MP4 (The sacrifice)

He did all this not for himself but for you and all those who believe in him so that you could have eternal life, so that you can be clean from your sin and shame, and be loved by the Heavenly Father again. That's why those who have encountered the sacrificial love of the cross, find that their lives are totally changed.

## **2. The Love of the cross is forgiving love (Luke 23v32—34)**

Even at his death Jesus was among sinners. He was crucified with sinners and died as a sinner even though he did not have any sin.

Jesus did not seek for payback. He did not seek retaliation against those who had him put to death. When Jesus said 'It is finished', he was saying his work was completed – a work that included paying for the sins of those nailing him to the cross.

In marriage when a husband and wife have an argument, or should we say 'a discussion', it is not necessarily a question of who is right or who is wrong. Both may have a point. And when others criticise us or attack us or persecute us – it is often not about right or wrong. Often the one being attacked is innocent. Even if we are right, or doing what is right, we may not always win or come out on top. Sometimes even when you have done the right thing you can be criticised or disliked by your partner or by others. You tried your best but still could not win their appreciation or make them happy. People might mistreat you and you know they are doing it deliberately. You can see clearly how they are scheming.

When Jesus said "Forgive them for they do not know what they are doing," doesn't it seem ridiculous? Of course these people knew what they were doing! They wanted to get rid of Jesus because of jealousy and because Jesus had exposed their sin and hypocrisy. Maybe out of fear too they wanted to silent Jesus forever. And they got what they wanted. Jesus was put to death, not just normal death but a cruel humiliating slow death.

Jesus had not done anything wrong. All he did was to heal the sick. He touched the blind and restored their sight. He healed the woman subject to bleeding; saved an adulterous woman who was about to be stoned to death, and forgave her sin; touched lepers and healed them. He fed the hungry 5000 men (or more), in another case 4000 men (or more). He saved the life of the disciple by calming the storm; raised the dead girl and gave her back to her heart-broken father.

But Jesus forgave them all. He forgave the Jewish leaders who called for his death. Why was Jesus able to forgive them? After all they planned it all. They schemed to have him killed? And how was it that Jesus forgave those who actually carried out his crucifixion? Jesus was able to forgive because he loved them. He saw their hearts and minds were blinded by the enemy. They could not see who Jesus really was. All they

could see was their own status and reputation being threatened. Jesus challenged the empty things they held so dear – the power, the influence, the wealth – all things that pass away.

Applying this to ourselves – maybe there are those who despise us or think little of us. Maybe there are some who only see our weaknesses or what we lack, what we don't have. Yes, it is unfair. Jesus knows that. He knows that it is painful. He knows it is betrayal.

But let us remember – it is because of His love that our sins are forgiven. Who do you think really crucified Jesus? It is us. It is our sin that he bore in his body on the cross. We are no better than those who plotted his death or those who actually nailed him to the cross.

Are there people that you find it difficult to forgive? How about those at work or school? How about your partner, your spouse? The things he or she has done that hurt you so much. Whenever you think of that person, you feel uncomfortable. This is unforgiveness.

**Illustration:** One of the most powerful prayers in the midst of suffering I have read was uncovered from the horrors of Ravensbruck concentration camp. Ravensbruck was a concentration camp built in 1939 for women. Over 90,000 women and children perished in Ravensbruck, murdered by the Nazis. Corrie Ten Boom, who wrote *The Hiding Place*, was imprisoned there too. The prayer, found in the clothing of a dead child, says:

O Lord, remember not only the men and woman of good will, but also those of ill will. But do not remember all of the suffering they have inflicted upon us: Instead remember the fruits we have borne because of this suffering, our fellowship, our loyalty to one another, our humility, our courage, our generosity, the greatness of heart that has grown from this trouble. When our persecutors come to be judged by you, let all of these fruits that we have borne be their forgiveness.

What a powerful prayer, all the suffering and pains would not able to captivate her, her heart is free. I know it is so difficult to forgive, that is why you need Jesus's strength to forgive. On the cross, he said "It is finished". He already broke down the wall of unforgiveness because he himself made that first step. Ask Jesus's strength of forgiveness to come into your life. If you want to be healed from your hurt and pain, forgiveness is the first step. When you choose to forgive you can then be free from bitterness and hurts.

### **3. The Love of the cross is the highest love (John 15:13; Romans 5:8)**

John 15:13 (NLT) There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends.

Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

The greatest love is someone willing to lay down his life for his friend, someone they know, someone with whom they have a relationship. But what kind of love is it, if one dies for his enemy? What does it mean when Paul writes, "while we were still sinners"? It means while we keep on doing things that hurt us or others. Who do we sin against? God. While we were hurting God, while we were using our life to disgrace him, he was willing to take our place for the punishment. He was willing to go on that cross and live out his love for us.

So we too are to love those who persecute us or do wrong to us. It is not about how much that person has done for me, or whether that person deserves my love or not. Rather, it is a choice, and this choice allows true love to flow out from our heart to love the person. E.g., Dam, or a bottle need to be opened for the

water to be released. Just like the choice will bring down water, our choice will bring down love. The love of the cross to come on us so that we are able to love.

E.g. Ya-Wen 雅雯: She was class mate of my late wife when they were at university. No one wanted to be her friend because she hurt others. She herself was a hurtful person, because of some accident, her mother caused her to become crippled and she was brought up in orphanage. There was lot of bitterness in her. Later she came to our church and we helped her settle down in our church, tried to help her in any way we could even though she had big quarrels with others.

Maybe because we talked to her about how she was hurting other people, one day she decided to report a false incident to our mother church and grand-mother church. They rang me out of concern and care about us. We explained the situation and all was OK. However Ya-Wen also affected some of our co-worker's and committee members, people we trusted. When this lady did wrong against us, it was difficult, but at the same time we asked God to see her from His eyes. We saw the pain and bitterness in her. We felt pity for her. My late wife and I prayed earnestly, and continued to be good to her. When she applied for a government grant and needed a guarantor about her situation, we did that for her. One day in-front of the co-worker's committee she admitted she had made false accusations and apologised for her actions. Even after my late wife's death and after I came back to NZ, she posted things on Facebook and she continues to praise God for the things we did for her in various part of her life.

That is the power of forgiveness and love. Not that we are someone great. We were simply seeking to live out God's word. I truly believe when we live out the life of love it will bring healing and restoration to relationships. So we are not just to forgive those who wronged us but to love them. Forgiveness will bring freedom and healing to our life and love will bring life and joy.

### **There is victory through the love of the cross**

Why? Because Satan has never understood the love of God, just like the prodigal son did not understand his father's love. So Satan hates love. But on the cross we can see how Jesus loves us. That love breaks the normal patterns or ways of life. It breaks the bondage of hurts, it breaks the chain of shame and accusation.

All sins are to do with our heart; anger – that can lead to murder; and lust that can lead to adultery. There is no sin that God can't forgive (except blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, which is rejecting the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts). So we can bring all our sin to God and ask for forgiveness and all things become new.

If God has forgiven us why can't we forgive ourselves? If Jesus accepts us, why can't we accept ourselves?

Don't keep on feeling condemned but nail your condemnation on the cross. Nail your hurts to the cross.

**Let us nail our bitterness, self-pity, insecurity, worries, low self-esteem, failure, feel useless, anger, jealousy... on the cross.**

God loves us and he wants to set us free from sin and pain. When we look at the cross next time, just remember Jesus' love, his sacrifice. Remember there is no sin he can't forgive, there is no greater love than the love he has given us. He wants us to live out that sacrifice, that forgiveness, that love, so others may experience the power of the cross and life of God's kingdom.