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#106

## "Love On the Cross" John 19:23-27

### Introduction

Once a quarter or so, a group of RP's pastors meet for lunch. We enjoy fellowship, share the Word and pray together. This last week we were together and the conversation somehow turned to epitaphs – those short remembrances written on gravestones. Today, they usually don't contain much more than the vital statistics of one's name and date of birth and death. But historically they were a way to remember a man's last words. One of the pastors told of a gravestone he'd seen that simply said *I told you I was sick*. It is reported that Ruth Graham found what she wanted on her tombstone when she read a sign while driving with her husband Billy one day in the country. Evidently he honored her request and it reads: *End of Construction: Thank you for your patience*. But all agreed that the clearest words and the most powerful epitaphs are one's that proclaim the truth of God's Word. A grave side marker of one of the Puritans quotes the words of the prophet Amos: *Prepare to meet your God . . . He who made the Pleiades and Orion And changes deep darkness into morning, Who also darkens day into night, Who calls for the waters of the sea And pours them out on the surface of the earth, The Lord is His name*. What a great testimony – the witness of Pleiades and Orion which we can still see on a cold winter's night – call men to prepare to meet the Lord!

We are in the middle of a study of the hours Jesus spent on the cross. The focus given to us by

the gospel writers is not the agony of the physical pain, although we know it was enormous, but rather on the person and work of Jesus, right up to His last breath. As one commentator appropriately observed, the things Jesus said on the cross were not really His last words, since He rose again and spoke many more things. But nonetheless the words Jesus spoke as He was dying give a clear and ringing testimony to all that He had come to do. We have already studied his prayer of forgiveness offered for those who crucified Him. We saw last week how He graciously granted life to one of the criminals who believed in Him. Today we are going to see the depth of His love. While becoming sin on behalf of those He was giving His life for, Jesus demonstrated the depth of His love in reaching out to those who drew near to Him. Because of Jesus' love for you, He will meet your every need. It's a very touching passage before us today. Men receive His love not because they are worthy or because it is cost nothing for God to love us, but because He is love and His very act of dying was a demonstration of that love.

### [John 19:23-27]

It's hard to love when surrounded by hatred. When one is attacked and humiliated and mocked and scorned – especially if it's done unjustly – emotions are stirred, defenses go up. Hatred easily begets anger, bitterness and more hatred. If you've ever been unjustly maligned then you've probably had to deal with it. The Bible warns against returning evil for evil – and of taking revenge – because God knows well the tendencies of our heart.

And this is what makes the gospel such remarkable good news. The story of the cross is not a story of Jesus doing something for us because we deserved it. Not because we had been kind and loving toward Him. Not because we had begged Him to make things right. Not because we recognized our need. The story of the cross is the story of Christ loving us when we hated Him – when we neglected Him, when we stood up and protested His laws and commands. He loved us while we were yet sinners.

We've seen that Christ was surrounded by hatred – from the chief priests, to the guards, to the other criminals, to the average citizen passing by.

Our text opens today by telling us of the actions of the soldiers. There were four guards in the crucifixion detail. According to Roman custom they divided up the clothes of the crucified among themselves. But in Jesus' case, after splitting up the rest of his garments, the tunic which was one solid piece, was left. So they decided to cast lots – to gamble for it. This little piece of information is significant for a number of reasons.

- It is a direct fulfillment of Scripture. We sang of it in Psalm 22 this morning. This is another clear reminder that the death of Christ was no accident. It was planned by the Father and Son from the beginning of time. No detail of the cross was outside of His redemptive purpose. If God could plan for something as insignificant as the disposal of Jesus' clothes, we can surely see that His death itself was not a mistake – and that it has great significance.
- It underscores the depth of His humility. The value of the Christ is not measured in possessions. He had nothing in death.

He became our sacrifice – without covering, without clothing, He bore our sin and shame. Without worldly goods – nothing to offer – except His sinless being. He who knew no sin became sin on our behalf.

But our focus today is the love of Christ. For it is in the midst of this great suffering, this mighty work of paying the penalty for our sin, that Jesus continues to express the love that took Him to the cross.

There were several people at the cross who loved Jesus. Several who had believed in Him. Besides the disciple John, described as the disciple whom He loved, there was (vs. 25) Jesus' mother Mary, Mary the wife of Clopas and Mary Magdalene.

We know very little of Mary the wife of Clopas. From the other gospel accounts we learn that she was the mother of James the Lesser and Joses. One church historian says that her husband was the brother of Joseph, Mary's husband. She appears a couple of times at the end of the gospels and we can only assume that she was a woman of faith.

We know more about Mary Magdalene. She was called Mary Magdalene, likely because she was from the city of Magdalene, which was in Galilee. She is a prime figure in the days surrounding the crucifixion and resurrection. Prior to that we find her name mentioned only once. In Luke 8 we read that there were some women who accompanied Jesus on his travels, *“who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses: Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who were contributing to their support out of their private means.”*

So, we learn a couple of important things. First, Mary had been delivered from seven demons. Many have assumed that this means Mary Magdalene was an immoral woman, perhaps a prostitute. But there is no reason to make that assumption. Demon possession can cause many different kinds of affliction. All we can assume is that she was greatly tormented and headed for destruction before Jesus saved her. Secondly, we learn of her generosity. The text tells us she traveled with Jesus and provided for the needs of He and His disciples.

When Jesus is crucified she is there. And furthermore, she takes a great deal of responsibility for His care after His death. On the first day of the week we find her heading to the tomb to further anoint His body with oils. It was while so engaged that she is the first disciple to whom the resurrected Christ appears.

What was it that took Mary Magdalene to the cross and to the tomb? Was it not her gratitude? Here is a woman who had been forgiven much. Her former manner of life was in the clutches of the devil. But Jesus had washed her clean. He'd given her a new life. And she spent every day looking for ways to thank Him and serve Him *because He loved her!* That same kind of thing should take us to the cross. If Jesus Christ has loved you and forgiven your sins and given you a new life and a new start, then you to will find yourself clinging to Christ with all your heart.

But of the few that were friends of Christ at the cross that day, it was Mary, Jesus' mother to who He turned His particular attention. There are no doubt that many today have gone far beyond the teaching of Scripture in ascribing to Mary a sinless state and holding her up as one to be worshipped and prayed to. We can only affirm what the

Scriptures say. Mary was a woman with a fallen nature like ours. She was ordinary in her own day. The thing that made Mary special was not her own virtue, but it was God's grace. In Luke 1:28 the angel came and said to her, "*Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you.*" The words 'favored one' literally means, 'the one upon whom grace is bestowed'. Mary found grace in the eyes of the Lord. His presence made her special, just as it does for all who receive His grace.

It's also true that the Scriptures acknowledge God's special blessing upon her and that from that time on all nations would call her blessed.

The Bible does not tell us many details about the life of Mary. But in the few things we do see there is one conclusion that is inescapable. Mary was a woman of faith.

When the prophecy of her coming virgin birth was announced, Mary believed the promise of God. She received the Word with all humility. She is described as a woman who pondered all that was happening and treasuring them in her heart. While not apparently accompanying Jesus throughout His earthly ministry, she was present at the wedding in Cana. And it was through her faith and promptings that Jesus performed His first miracle. While all of her other children would at first not believe in Christ, we never find any doubt in Mary.

And so it was that on the day of His crucifixion, there was Mary standing as close to the cross as she could get. And in the most tender of all events, we see that Jesus had not forgotten His mother. His mother and John were the only friends He spoke to that day.

Jesus hadn't forgotten his humble beginning in Bethlehem. He hadn't forgotten the careful nurture of His parents as he was raised in a

carpenter's home. He hadn't forgotten the day He left His home, left His mother and began His short life work.

Now as He hung on the cross, He must have seen pain in her eyes. But they shared something together – a common commitment to the will of God, no matter what the pain, no matter what the cost.

Jesus had once said, *“Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or fathers or mothers or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.”* They both had done that. They'd both counted the glory of God as more significant than anything else.

When He left His mother, did that mean he'd neglected her? No! His love for her was deep. And now as they said good-bye, sharing the pain, yet steadfast in their commitment, Jesus reached out to his mother and made provision for her life. *“Woman, behold your son. John, behold your mother.”*

Sometimes God will ask you to make sacrifices for Him. Sometimes He may ask you to let go of a piece of this life to follow Him. It was because Jesus loved Mary – not just as a son loves a mother – but as a Savior loves a sinner – it was because of that love that Mary was standing at the cross. It was Mary's deep faith and trust in Jesus that led her to the cross. And when Jesus reached out to her from His own agony as the sin bearer, we see that His love never fails. It's at the cross that we will find that Jesus Christ has died for our sakes, to take away our sin and to give us new life. But we can also see in this account that there is nothing beyond the notice Christ. You have no need that Jesus is not aware of. There is no pain you bear, nothing you need, that Jesus doesn't see. And when He provided for His mother in this tender

moment, you can gain the assurance that His love for you will move Him to meet your every need.

When you have a need, where do you go? Today I hope you will be moved to see that the love of Jesus for you ought to compel you to come to Christ. Cry out to Him. Pray. Pour your heart out to Him. He loves you. He has redeemed you. He has called you by name. He will be with you when you pass through deep waters.