

## Our Fear vs. Jesus' Love

<sup>4:16</sup> We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. <sup>17</sup> By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world. <sup>18</sup> There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love. <sup>19</sup> We love, because He first loved us. <sup>20</sup> If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. <sup>21</sup> And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also. (1 John 4:16 – 21)

<sup>23:32</sup> Two others also, who were criminals, were being led away to be put to death with him. <sup>33</sup> When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified him and the criminals, one on the right and the other on the left. <sup>34</sup> But Jesus was saying, 'Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.' And they cast lots, dividing up his garments among themselves. <sup>35</sup> And the people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at him, saying, 'He saved others; let him save himself if this is the Christ of God, His chosen one.' <sup>36</sup> The soldiers also mocked him, coming up to him, offering him sour wine, <sup>37</sup> and saying, 'If you are the King of the Jews, save yourself!' <sup>38</sup> Now there was also an inscription above him, 'This is the King of the Jews.' <sup>39</sup> One of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at him, saying, 'Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and us!' <sup>40</sup> But the other answered, and rebuking him said, 'Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation?' <sup>41</sup> And we indeed are suffering justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong.' <sup>42</sup> And he was saying, 'Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom!' <sup>43</sup> And he said to him, 'Truly I say to you, today you shall be with me in Paradise.' <sup>44</sup> It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour, <sup>45</sup> because the sun was obscured; and the veil of the temple was torn in two. <sup>46</sup> And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, 'Father, into your hands I commit my Spirit.' Having said this, he breathed his last. <sup>47</sup> Now when the centurion saw what had happened, he began praising God, saying, 'Certainly this man was innocent...' <sup>50</sup> And a man named Joseph, who was a member of the Council, a good and righteous man <sup>51</sup> (he had not consented to their plan and action), a man from Arimathea, a city of the Jews, who was waiting for the kingdom of God; <sup>52</sup> this man went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. <sup>53</sup> And he took it down and wrapped it in a linen cloth, and laid him in a tomb cut into the rock, where no one had ever lain. <sup>24:1</sup> But on the first day of the week, at early dawn, they came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. <sup>2</sup> And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, <sup>3</sup> but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. <sup>4</sup> While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men suddenly stood near them in dazzling clothing; <sup>5</sup> and as the women were terrified and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, 'Why do you seek the living One among the dead?' <sup>6</sup> He is not here, but he has risen. (Luke 23:32 – 24:6)

### Historical and Cultural Context

- *Roman* soldiers had occupied the land of *Israel* from 63 BCE and had crushed rebellion after rebellion. *Crucifixion* was what the Roman Empire did to failed revolutionaries and traitors.
- *Jesus* claimed to be the king of the Jews, but did not lead a military uprising, as most Jews expected him and other leaders to do.
- *The Jerusalem temple* was where God's presence used to dwell, behind the veil, in the section called the 'holy of holies.' Therefore many Jews hoped for a new king of Israel to emerge, cleanse the temple, and pave the way for God to return to it.
- *John* was one of Jesus' original twelve disciples; he eventually planted churches in the region of Asia Minor.

### Literary Structure of Luke 23:32 – 54

1. Jesus crucified. 23:32 – 34
2. Unbelieving Jews: The rulers of the Jews sneered at Jesus. 23:35
3. Unbelieving Gentiles: The soldiers mock Jesus. 23:36 – 38
4. Unbelieving Criminal: Criminal hurls curses at Jesus. 23:39
- 4'. Believing Criminal: Criminal believes Jesus, receives paradise. 23:40 – 43
- 3'. Believing Gentiles: The centurion praised God. 23:44 – 49
- 2'. Believing Jews: Joseph, a member of the council, cares for Jesus' body. 23:50 – 52
- 1'. Jesus buried. 23:53 – 54

## Questions

1. If you just looked at the newspaper, would you say that love is winning, in our world?
2. What makes you afraid of loving as radically and self-sacrificially as Jesus did? If people aren't that familiar with Jesus, read the Luke 23 passage together. Otherwise, start with 1 John 4.
  - a. Fear that love isn't that worthwhile
  - b. Fear that love will be unnoticed, abused, and forgotten
  - c. Illus: I'm certain that I would not have moved into a Mexican immigrant community in East Palo Alto, CA, as a single guy in 1995, or into a high crime area in Dorchester, MA as a married guy in 2000 to raise kids there, if I didn't fundamentally believe that Jesus' love is the most valuable thing EVER.
  - d. Illus: (Leader tell a brief story. I'm certain that I would not have \_\_\_\_\_ if I didn't fundamentally believe that Jesus' love is the most valuable thing EVER.)
  - e. What patterns of fear do you see in your life? Fear of pain; loss; being insignificant; not being loved; being alone; repeating a mistake – All of that tends to reduce down to the fear that love isn't worthwhile, so self-centeredness is more rewarding.
3. Read the 1 John 4 passage first. It's great at stating principles that we'll see lived out by Jesus in Luke 23.
  - a. Principle 1: 'God is love.' So when we say that love is worthwhile, it's because God is love, and we participate in who He is and what He is.
    - i. It's like becoming part of a great family. God IS already a family, in Himself.
  - b. Principle 2: We are being perfected by Jesus. 'Love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment'
    - i. The day of judgment is when two things happen at once: We judge Jesus, and Jesus judges us. They are one and the same thing (e.g. Jn.9:41).
    - ii. When Jesus judges us, he reveals our judgments, especially of himself (Rom.2:12 – 16).
    - iii. When we judge Jesus, we will either say, 'I want you, want to be like you, want to be with you,' or the opposite. If we say, 'Yes,' then he will perfect the perfecting in love. If we say, 'No,' then he will still love us, but we will receive him and his love like a stalker that we detest and want to be rid of.
  - c. Principle 3: What does John mean when he says that 'fear involves punishment'?
    - i. When we don't think about how much God loves us, we start to fear other people's opinions. And if people's opinions of us are negative, that becomes punishing. Notice that Jesus was not afraid of other people or their opinions. Even though they punished him by crucifixion, it wasn't something that swayed him from the path of loving God the Father and loving us.
    - ii. Fear is based on a view of God as punishing for punishment's sake. Which is false. God disciplines for restoration and learning, but not for punishment's sake. He is restorative, not retributive.
    - iii. Fear brings about a self-inflicted punishment
    - iv. Fear interferes with God's love, and that interference is its own punishment
  - d. Principle 4: 'If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother' (1 Jn.4:20),
    - i. Discussion: Who is it easy for you to hate, or to be angry at long-term?
    - ii. How easy would it have been for Jesus to hate those who were crucifying him? It's remarkable that he said, 'Father, forgive them...' (Lk.23:34).
4. Now read about Jesus' death and resurrection in Luke 23 – 24. How does Jesus show the love of God rather than give in to fear?
  - a. As we mentioned before, Jesus said, 'Father, forgive them' (Lk.23:34) right from the beginning of this cruel episode
  - b. Also, Jesus is offering himself as king to those around him. He allows himself to be mocked. But in reality, he is the king, and he is showing everyone how to win other people to himself and to God by sacrifice, innocence, and love.
    - i. Notice how often the theme of Jesus' innocence comes up? How would you feel about being slandered if you were innocent?
  - c. Jesus is starting a movement of his love. Notice the Literary Structure of Luke 23. People start siding with Jesus:
    - i. The believing criminal. Jesus gives him 'paradise' or 'Eden.'
    - ii. The believing Gentile: the centurion

iii. The believing Jewish ruler: Joseph of Arimathea

5. In what sense is Jesus' love the victory of Love?
- a. Because God raised Jesus from the dead, Jesus' act of love and self-sacrifice was vindicated. That's what matters for eternity. In a sense, love and self-sacrifice in Jesus' name are therefore vindicated for us as we share with him in his way of life. That's why love for the brother or sister in 1 John 4:20 is important.
  - b. Perhaps fundamentally, our fears are rooted in the deeper fear that love will be abused, wasted, and forgotten. We are afraid that acts of love will not mean anything in the end. We are afraid that love will come to nothing.
  - c. Jesus' death is not about self-negation, but a reconciliation of people with God the Father. Jesus loved the Father and loved us. His whole life was a reconciliation of human nature back to God. So he was the temple of God, where God dwelled on earth, which is why the Jerusalem temple was no longer useful, and why God tore the veil. Its purpose to foreshadow Jesus was done and completed.
  - d. Discussion: Describe a time when you were afraid to be a loving person. Why were you afraid?
  - e. Illus: Harry Potter, love vs. death. 'Ms. Rowling said the books are "summed up" and "epitomized" by the scriptural passages Harry and Hermione read in the Godric Hollow graveyard on Christmas Eve. The stories are about Love's victory over death and the importance of making the right choice about where to keep your treasure. (Shawn Adler, 'Harry Potter' Author J.K. Rowling Opens Up About Books' Christian Imagery, Oct 17 2007)
  - f. Illus: The movie *Marvin's Room*. Diane Keaton and Meryl Streep play two sisters who have not spoken to each other for years, ever since Meryl Streep's character left home and left Diane Keaton's character to care for their aging father alone. One sister left to go live her life independently. She comes back when her sister says that Dad is dying. So she asks, 'How did you manage?' The sister played by Diane Keaton says, 'It was the love.' Meryl Streep says, 'Dad wasn't a loving person. What love are you talking about?' Diane Keaton says, 'It wasn't that I was loved. It's that I was loving.'