

Weekly Reflection – “That ultimate love of God.”

According to Merriam-Webster the definition for ultimate is, “the best or most extreme of its kind.” There is no comparing the pleasure of walking out of prison and walking into the arms of your wife. Being set free from prison would be great but not ultimate, walking into the arms of your wife after being set free from prison is ultimate. For sure it is a glorious thing to be set free, to be forgiven, no longer a slave to sin and death. But if we stop there, at walking out of prison, we are not experiencing the greater thing. Knowing you are forgiven is an amazing thing, knowing you are no longer a slave to sin is amazing, knowing you have been made right should bring great joy. We must see that all of these amazing truths are a means to something more and greater. Forgiveness of sins is a means to something more and greater. Redemption from slavery is a means to something more and greater. Ultimately, finally, that “more and greater” is God Himself. **“For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,” (1 Peter 3:18 ESV)** To see God. To know God. To enjoy God. Walking into heaven is a million times greater than walking out of hell. Because God is there.

What He gave so that He could be with us and love us forever.

1 John 3:16 – “By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.” God the Father, sent His Son so that He could be with us and love us forever. That's what He gave so He could love you. That's the highest thing He could give. God gave Himself so He could be with you and love you forever.

How little we deserved His love.

I know some of us think we're pretty amazing, and who wouldn't want to love us, but have you ever stopped and thought about how little we deserve to be with God so we can experience His intimate covenant love? The reality is He was willing to pay the highest price to be with us and love us forever even though there was nothing about us that deserved this love. **Romans 5:6-10 – “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. [7] For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— [8] but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. [9] Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. [10] For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.”** The logic of these verses is inescapable, everything about us was undeserving of what God paid for us. We were weak, we were ungodly, we were sinners, and we were His enemies; and He gave His life so that He could be with us and love us forever. This is the very meaning of grace.

The generosity of His love.

1 John 3:1 - “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him.” John is pleading with us, “See, look at this, pay attention to this, behold this.” He's trying to get our attention. There is something different here about this love. This is something a little bit unique here. He didn't just forgive us and then tell us to live happily ever after. No, He adopted us, made us His children.

You know what it means to be adopted by God the Father? **Romans 8:17 – “and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him.”** Heirs of God, that God's now ours in some way, and fellow heirs with Christ. **Ephesians 1:3 – “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places.”** God is not stingy with His love.

Intentionality

Intentionality has a weight to it. It brings a value, a significance to our actions when they're intentional. I think this is true with good or bad intentions. Now, the question I want to answer is, “Did Jesus freely and intentionally die so that He could be with us and love us forever?” Or did Jesus get forced to the cross, did He unintentionally get crucified and we just happened to get blessed? Did Jesus freely choose to go to the cross and die so that He could give His life for weak, ungodly, sinners and enemies; and lavish His love all over us for all of eternity?

Most of you, if you're thinking with me, know the answer, but we are not just going after the answer here, we're going after comprehending it, taking possession of it, experiencing it; that's what will change you, not just knowing it cognitively.

Jesus freely and intentionally chose to love you.

Jesus wasn't forced into doing what He didn't want to do. He wanted to lay down His life, so that He could be with you and pour out His love on you forever. **John 10:17-18 – “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. [18] No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”** Jesus said, “No one takes My life from Me.” And maybe you're thinking, “But wait a minute, I know how this is going to play out. You get killed. You get nailed to a cross. What do You mean no one takes your life? What about Judas, he betrayed You? What about the angry mobs that dragged You into court? The high priest, the false witness, the crowds who cried crucify Him, Herod and Pilate. Pilate handed You over to the crowd, the Roman soldiers that nailed You to the cross. What do you mean, Jesus, no one takes your life from You?”

Is this really true for you and me, that the Son of God freely and intentionally laid down His life so that He could be with us and love us forever? We're going to come back to this passage, but I want to look at the journey to the cross, to see if the entire way Jesus was intentionally choosing, freely choosing to go to the cross and lay down His life.

Mark 10:32-34 – “And they were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them. And they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. And taking the twelve again, he began to tell them what was to happen to him, [33] saying, “See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death and deliver him over to the Gentiles. [34] And they will mock him and spit on him, and flog him and kill him. And after three days he will rise.”

Do you see the intentionality? He knew where He was going and He knew why He was going there. He's saying they will do this. This is what's going to happen and I'm intentionally still choosing to go to Jerusalem. **Luke 9:51 - “When the days drew near for him to be taken up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.”** He was choosing to go to Jerusalem where He knew the cross was waiting for him.

Luke 22:41-44 – “And he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and knelt down and prayed, [42] saying, “Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.” [43] And there appeared to him an angel from heaven, strengthening him. [44] And being in agony he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down to the ground.”

Notice what He is not asking. He is not asking, “Father, are you sure you want to do this? Are you sure we want to be with these people forever?” Jesus asks, “Is there any other way for this to happen.” Jesus wasn't asking because He didn't want to be with you, but because He was looking into the horror of what was about to happen. This scene magnifies how freely and intentionally Jesus was about making a way to be with you forever so that He could love you. He was willing to go through the most excruciating horror and agony imaginable so that He could be with you and love you forever.

John 18:4-8 – “Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, “Whom do you seek?” [5] They answered him, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus said to them, “I am he.” Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. [6] When Jesus said to them, “I am he,” they drew back and fell to the ground. [7] So he asked them again, “Whom do you seek?” And they said, “Jesus of Nazareth.” [8] Jesus answered, “I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go.”

Jesus asks this mob, “Who are you looking for?” They answer, “Jesus of Nazareth.” Jesus responds, “I am He.” The mob steps back and falls to the ground. Certainly, if Jesus speaking the words “I Am” knocked the angry mob to the ground than He could have prevented this from happening. My point is that Jesus was in complete control and Jesus is making it known that He is in control.

Matthew 26:50-56 Jesus said to him, “Friend, do what you came to do.” Then they came up and laid hands on Jesus and seized him. [51] And behold, one of those who were with Jesus stretched out his hand and drew his sword and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his ear. [52] Then Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. [53] Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? [54] But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?”

He's saying, “No one's taking My life from Me, this is what I'm choosing to do. Don't you think if I didn't want to do this, I would just call 12 legions of angels, and this would be over right now.” Jesus is saying, “Peter, put your sword away. I want you to have eternal life, Peter, I want you to know how much I love you, Peter, I'm choosing to do this.”

Luke 22:50-53 And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. [51] But Jesus said, “No more of this!” And he touched his ear and healed him. [52] Then Jesus said to the chief priests and officers of the temple and elders, who had come out against him, “Have you come out as against a robber, with swords and clubs? [53] When I was with you day after day in the temple, you did not lay hands on me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness.”

Jesus says, “Guys, I've been around you for the last three years. Why didn't you do something? You think it was because you chose to wait till now to do this? Do you think you had the power to somehow decide that this was the right timing?” Jesus is saying, “You didn't do it because it wasn't your hour yet, but now it's your hour, now you can. I decide the hour, not you. I'm walking willingly with My eyes wide open with all of my heart to the cross.”

John 10:18 - "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father."

"I have authority to lay down my life." I think any one of us could say that to some degree, like I have the authority to decide when I die, and there's a sense where we do. But if then we say, "I have authority to lay down my life, but I also have the authority to take it back up again," that's a different thing. Dead people don't typically have authority to decide when they come out of the grave. I think this is key in seeing how intentional His love is for us is. Jesus says, "Not only do I have the freedom to lay down My life when I want to, but I also have the freedom to take it out of the grave again." Which to me, is the big exclamation point that He really had the freedom to lay it down to begin with. That every moment when it looked like He was being forced to do what He didn't want to do, He was doing exactly what He wanted to do. Jesus is saying, "I laid down My life so that I could love you. I wasn't forced to do anything. I freely and intentionally chose to lay down my life."

Complete freedom, complete intentionality, so that He could be with you and love you for all of eternity. He did it on purpose, because He really wants to be with you and lavish His love on you for all of eternity. He intentionally and freely came out of the grave on the third day so that He could be with you and love you forever. ***1 Corinthians 15:17-20 - "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. [18] Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. [19] If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. [20] But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep."***