

THE EPITOME OF LOVE

Luke 23:33-34

An epitome is an inclusion of the sum and substance of a thing into a word or a person. Where could the word be so appropriate and meaningful as in the death of Christ for the sins of the world? He died for the world because He loved to the limit. "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "So loved" has meaning too great to be understood. What depth! What height! What breadth! What length! What unfathomable significance in those words! This world has seen many demonstrations of love, but Christ's death climaxes and surpasses them all. Christ is the epitome of love.

What is love? It is hard to define or to explain. Paul said, "Love suffereth long and is kind; love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked; taketh not account of evil; rejoiceth not in unrighteousness, but rejoiceth with the truth." That truly is love. It has the ingredients of patience, kindness, generosity, humility, courtesy, unselfishness and sincerity. Christ is the very essence of these, plus any and all other elements of love. His death on the cross is the greatest expression of love. As He died He did not talk platitudinously about love; He eloquently demonstrated love. His love is so deep that it cannot be fathomed, so broad that it cannot be measured, so meaningful that it cannot be described, and so intense that it cannot be supplemented. A study of Christ on Calvary portrays three things.

I. Love Revealing.

In many ways God has revealed Himself to mankind--through nature, through His Word, and finally through the death of Christ on the tree. The zenith of God's love blazes and burns on Calvary. Through this drastic demonstration God crushed the serpent's head, despoiled Satan's power, depleted death, and extinguished the fires of hell for every believer. For these things, honor, praise, glory and thanksgiving should ascend up to Him forever and ever.

In *Oliver Twist*, an interview is held between Rose Maylie, with the sweetness of her pure girlhood, and the soiled and outcast Nancy. Dickens describes how the kind tone, sweet voice, and gentle manner of Rose took the girl completely by surprise. Nancy burst into tears and, clasping her hands, cried, "Oh lady! lady! if there were more like you there would be fewer like me--there would, there would!"

Christ's unspeakable love reveals sin. Many have attempted in various ways to picture the blackness, bitterness and horribleness of sin, but no one has succeeded. Christ's death reveals sin in all of its sinfulness. On Calvary the innocent died for the guilty. He was wounded, bruised, battered and beaten. Death agonies gripped Him, clammy sweat stood on His brow, His tongue cleft to the roof of His mouth, and He writhed in agony.

Sin has riven and shivered the earth with its volcanic fires and lurid darkness. Wherever it has gained the ascendancy, it has made the world gloomy, desolate, barren and ugly. It has blasted lives and doomed souls. Christ's death was the supreme love act to conquer sin.

"Lord, now indeed I find
Thy power, and Thine alone,
Can change the leper's spots,
And melt the heart of stone.

"Jesus paid it all,
All to Him I owe;
Sin had left a crimson stain,
He washed it white as snow."

Christ's death reveals the one plan of salvation. God gave His Son as a ransom for the sins of the world. Everywhere people were aimlessly wandering and hopelessly doomed, without God, without Christ, and without hope. On the cross Christ bore our griefs, carried our sorrows, was wounded for our transgressions, and was bruised for our iniquities. By His stripes we are healed. Christ saves from the guilt, the power, the fetters, the bondage, the darkness, and the penalty of sin.

"Was it for crimes that I have done,
He groaned upon the tree?
Amazing pity! grace unknown!
And love beyond degree!"

II. Love Suffering.

"Love suffereth long and is kind." On the cross the suffering of Christ was intense, agonizing and fearful. While He suffered, multitudes reviled Him, His disciples and friends forsook Him, and His spirit was crushed. God for a time withdrew, yet not a murmur, nor an unkind word, nor a complaint was heard from Him.

Christ suffered humiliation. The shame that He suffered was boundless. Think of Him being spit upon! Think of the King of Kings and Lord of lords being despised and rejected! Think of the joyous One of heaven becoming the Man of Sorrows. Think of the Son of God being stripped of His garments, blindfolded, beaten with fists, and having to die a felon's death! Was humiliation ever more humiliating, or shame ever more shameful? But, in the midst of it all, He cried: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." He suffered the bitterest agony of pain and death.

"I suffered much for thee,
More than thy tongue can tell,
Of bitterest agony,
To rescue thee from hell."

III. Love Lifting.

Christ Jesus said, "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me." He came to lift, to liberate, and to save.

"In loving kindness Jesus came,
My soul in mercy to reclaim,
And from the depths of sin and shame
Thru grace He lifted me;

"From sinking sand He lifted me,
With tender hand He lifted me,

From shades of night to planes of light,
O praise His name,
He lifted me!"

There is power in His lift. This power fills the darkest night with stars of hope, the blackest dungeon with the light of salvation, and the most forlorn bosom with the ecstasy of hope. His arms were extended to all lost sinners.

There is pardon in His lift. Pardon--what a word! It denotes release, liberty, salvation and freedom.

Nothing is so needed by the lost, condemned sinner as pardon. Christ offers pardon, full and free, to every lost sinner. Are you desolate? There is pardon for you. Are you hopeless in your feelings? There is pardon for you. Are you in the bonds of iniquity? There is pardon for you. Are you miserable and undone? There is pardon for you. "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him: and to our God for He will abundantly pardon."

There is grace in the lift of Christ which is sufficient to save unto the uttermost all who come unto Him.

"Marvelous, infinite, matchless grace,
Freely bestowed on all who believe;
You that are longing to see His face,
Will you this moment His grace receive?"

The supreme work of Christ is that of lifting souls out of the pits of iniquity, and placing them on the heights of God. His crowning work is liberating souls from the bondage of sin.

"Marvelous grace of our loving Lord,
Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt,
Yonder on Calvary's mount outpoured,
There where the blood of the Lamb was spilt."

His mercy clothes poetry with power, strikes the shackles of sin's slavery from the prisoners of sin, makes the weak strong, the sick well, and the sinful pure. Mercy is God's love getting results. It is God's love bringing the wanderer home. It is God made tangible to and available for man. It is God beneath the load of man's sin.

"Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all."