

LOVE AND THE CROSS

And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom.
And Jesus said unto him, verily I say unto thee, today shalt thou be with me in paradise.
Luke 23:43

As Jesus hung on the cross at Calvary, two thieves hung on their crosses to the right and left of Jesus. One thief was filled with contempt; the other with compassion and faith. The one with compassion knew he was wrong, and that Jesus was righteous. This thief declared belief; a declaration that moved Jesus to state and the Bible to record that *today this man will be with me in paradise.*

For those who make Jesus their Saviour, Paradise is a destination after life in this world but paradise is also a positioning throughout life. What the Lord does is place Himself in the heart of a person who receives Jesus first and then the gift of Salvation Jesus gives. One must be touched by the love of Christ to know He is and be moved by Him in order to take from Him. This is paradise. To know the love of Jesus is to have it alive in a heart all days of one's life that lead to the great day of joining Him in Paradise.

Love is costly. Very costly. The price is self. One must give up one's perspective, ambition, opinions, preference, and will, to love. To love purely. The truest test is of the presence of love is less of self and forgiveness. The cross stands for love because it is the place where the deepest love came to include all and to pardon the unlovely. The unlovely that is present in all of us at different times. The cross stands as the beacon of forgiveness for all who will receive Jesus and His forgiveness. Then, only then, is forgiveness possible. The price of loving someone—a family member, spouse, friend, pastor, colleague, child, and one's self—is whether or not forgiveness is given freely and received graciously. If it is not, the love of Jesus is not alive in a heart. Self is. The patience of Jesus is great to wait for self to ebb.

Losses in life, disappointments, and abrupt sadness can cause hearts to become hard and love to cease from flowing. It is human and universal for people to be hurt and to hurt others, knowingly and unknowingly. The sure sign Jesus in a heart is one's desire to make all things right and unified, even if that means things not turning out as one expected. The peace and unity is what is most important; it is the love of reconciliation that Jesus so honors. But when someone holds a grudge and will not be kind or forgiving, Jesus still forgives. When one has been intentionally hurtful, Jesus still forgives. Although the Lord understands fully the heart that so cold that it will not forgive, each day that passes when one does not attempt to make peace with himself or others, is a day further from fellowship and love with Jesus. Relationship with Jesus suffers the most. Whatever breaks one's heart, breaks the Lord's heart far more deeply.

The two thieves on the cross were separated by the state of their hearts. One thief was filled with self and wanted his own way, and got it. That meant not getting Jesus and being the recipient of His love, nor the love of others. The other thief wanted Jesus and, got Jesus. In the process he forgave himself, opened his heart to God's love, and became the inheritor of an eternal home with Jesus. When we love Jesus and are filled with Him, we always get more than we ever thought possible. *With God all things are possible* (Matthew 19:26).

The act of love at Calvary continues to flow with power today; a today that invites everyone to receive Jesus and His love into the heart. If you have done that, you can be encouraged and warmed as you meditate on the love and peace you and Jesus share together and that flows forth to others. If you have not, the Jesus of Calvary stands at the door of your heart and knocks, wanting you to open the door and let Him in. May your heart be made and kept through the love of Jesus. His love is the most trusted love of all. The love of Jesus is a foretaste of paradise, and a relationship that shall last and endure all the tests and seasons of life in this world. May you share this incomparable love with Jesus—today.

Lord Jesus, life hurts at times. But the warmth and strength of Your love and presence abound with assurance and peace. Lord, You know the hearts of people. You know when life hurts and that which dwells in a heart to make it difficult for people to reach out to love and be loved. Love is hard for some to give, and hard for some to receive. Jesus, Your love always has the potential to soften hearts and to bring people to new dawns of forgiveness, grace, and unity that make for paradise. Lord, thank You each day for the power of Your love and the cross that continues to prove all that is indeed possible because of You. In Thee, Lord Christ, Amen.