

How Much He loved you...
The Passion of the Christ
Mark 15: 1- 47

Friends, they say you can tell what someone really loves by what they are willing to suffer for, and if that is true then the level of Christ's suffering demonstrates an amazing amount of love for us.

I pray that in reflecting on the account of the crucifixion tonight, the Holy Spirit will have revealed to you the true depth of our Lord's suffering so that you will realize and internalize just *how much* He loved you.

Jesus was willing to be falsely accused, scorned by the public, whipped, beaten, mocked, weakened, crucified, taunted, and misunderstood and give up his life in the end, because this was the only way to erase our sins and undo the consequence of sin which we all face – death.

And while Jesus comes to us and accepts us as we are – affected by sin and facing death – His willingness to suffer

what He did means that He loves us far too much to leave us like this.

He was willing to do whatever it took in order to free us from our sin and make death become the means by which we go to be with God until the new heavens and the new earth are established.

He suffered and gave his life – for you!

So how do we respond to this? – well friends if the Holy Spirit is working in your heart you will feel extremely grateful, you'll feel love and devotion to Christ, you'll want to be loyal to Him and you'll trust that his suffering and death really did erase all your sins before God – past, present and future- what a relief to know we're made right with God.

But being right with God by having our sins not counted against us is one thing. We are all only too aware that we are still plagued with our sinful nature, meaning that in spite of our status with God being listed as “forgiven...” we continue to struggle with wanting to do things which are not right.

And no matter how much emotion we might feel in response to the fact that Jesus was willing to undergo such excruciating suffering and death for us, that won't get rid of our sinful nature or stop us from wanting to do things which are wrong.

It may rein it in those desires for the rest of this evening, even tomorrow and Sunday morning perhaps, but in a short while we will catch ourselves venting our anger, being proud, speaking a cutting and harsh word, wrestling with lust, stretching the truth, telling a white lie, and so on...

And we might wonder if anything more can be done with our sinful nature than just forgiving it?

The good news friends is yes! – God not only makes us right **with** himself, which happened two thousand years ago when Jesus cried out and gave up his life for us. God also makes us right **for** Himself... but that is a process.

And if we look at how it was that God made us right **with** himself - through Jesus Christ undergoing suffering and death... then that indicates the way in which God is going to

work that process in our lives in order to make us right **for** himself.

God will allow **us** to undergo a process of suffering and trials and persecution and such in our lives in order to reveal to us our desire to do that which is wrong, and to help us die to it - not to punish us for it – we've been forgiven... but to help get it out of our lives.

This is why Hebrews 12:7, 10-11 says *“Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their parent?.... God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.”*

more and more we will desire less and less to do what is sinful – isn't that were you want to go?

And friends the emotions that you may feel tonight in response to Christ's suffering and death – the thankfulness, the gratitude, the love... those emotions are there to help you truly believe

and trust that the trials and struggles of life, the suffering which we go through are not consequences or punishments but is in fact God's discipline.

So that you can truly believe as Romans 8:28 says "*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*"

And you can have the patience to wait and see how that will come true in your life.

So Friends Good Friday is a watershed moment in our lives. I know that we've all had trials and struggles going on in our lives before tonight.

But... after seeing how much Jesus has suffered out of love for us...friends, going forward from this evening we must embrace our trials and struggles as the means by which God is working to take away our desire to sin.

Sometimes that means enduring suffering like Job did so that Satan or others can't accuse us of being fair-weather followers of Christ, cover-your-butt Christians.

Sometimes the trials in life reveal to us our anger, our pride, or our need for wisdom and show us that these are deeper issues than we first thought and we become aware that we need to surrender more of our life to Christ.

Sometimes things which claim our heart are taken away to show us we've put something in the place where only Christ belongs...

Friends, how God works to sanctify us through trials and suffering is as unique and individual as each of our lives – but we don't go through these trials alone.

We are to help each other by encouraging one another to resist the temptation to believe or feel that we're being punished.

We can help each other remember Good Friday, remember Jesus suffering, and remember the Love – so that we will be

able to trust that our suffering and trials are God's discipline process at work, getting rid of our desire to sin.

So, as we end our Good Friday service, I invite you to listen and reflect on the words of this last song – and ask God to speak to you about how He is working in your life in this way.

Amen.