

## LOVE WINS

### How's Your Heart?

<sup>14</sup> For this reason I kneel before the Father, <sup>15</sup> from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name. <sup>16</sup> I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, <sup>17</sup> so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, <sup>18</sup> may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, <sup>19</sup> and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

<sup>20</sup> Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, <sup>21</sup> to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen (Ephesians 3 v 14 – 21)

Jesus knew exactly what Paul wrote in these powerful and challenging words. Jesus knew what it was to know how wide and long and high and deep his Father's love was. Jesus knew what it was to be strengthened by the power of the spirit in his inner being. Jesus knew what it was to be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Jesus knew the power of God at work in him. Jesus knew what it was to have a heart in which the magnificent love of his Father dwelt. Jesus knew what it was to live in the truth of all that Paul writes in these few short verses.

Jesus lived in the full knowledge of his Father's great and magnificent love. Jesus was fully rooted and established in the vast, unmeasured boundless and free love of his Father. Perhaps Paul invites us, encourages us, quite simply, to live like Jesus.

To live like Jesus means that love wins. To live like Jesus means that love wins in our hearts, our minds, our emotions and our wills. When love wins in our hearts, minds, emotions and wills we are our best self, because when love wins we are most like Jesus.

So, I have a question for you: How's Your Heart?

Perhaps another way of asking the same question is this: How much does love win in your heart?

I have one more question for you: What if, one day, Jesus were to become you? That might seem a strange question – but stay with me for a moment. Perhaps it would help to ask the question this way: What if, one day, Jesus were to live your life? What if, one day, Jesus was to find himself in your body, as you? What if, one day, Jesus was to be you in your house? What if, one day, Jesus was to be you and do the things that you do in a day. What if, one day, Jesus was to live in your life, with your body, in your circumstances – the way life actually is for you.

What if, one day, Jesus came to be you when nothing changes about your life; your health doesn't change – it's as it is right now, today. The challenges you face don't change – they are the same challenges you face. If you're in work, your workplace and your responsibilities don't change – it is the same as it actually is for you at work. If you're at school or university – nothing changes – it's the same for Jesus as it is, now, for you. If you're retired or not in work – life remains the same – it's the same life you live day to day in all the places that you go. What if then, one day, Jesus becomes you and comes to live your life?

I wonder what you're thinking? I wonder which parts of your life are you reflecting on the most right now, in these moments, as you consider the thought that Jesus might become you! For me, certainly, this is a profoundly challenging thought.

I asked the question: What if Jesus were to become you and live your life – a profoundly challenging question. But, what if Jesus were to do that with one difference from your life: What if Jesus were to live your life with his heart.

What if your life was led by the heart of Jesus?

What if his words became your words?

What if his thoughts become your thoughts?

What if his ways become your ways?

What if the things he hears become the things you hear?

What if the things he sees become the things you see?

What if the things he seeks become the things you seek?

What if the things he loves become the things you love?

What if his priorities become your priorities?

What if his actions became your actions?

What if his decisions became your decisions?

What if his love became the basis for your behaviour?

If Jesus were to become you, with his heart, how different would you be?

If Jesus were to become you, with his heart, how much would those around you notice – your family, your boss, your friends, your neighbours?

If Jesus were to become you, with his heart, how much would the poor, the lonely, the outcast notice?

If Jesus were to become you, with his heart, how much would those you consider your enemies notice?

If Jesus were to become you, with his heart, how much would those around you notice more grace, more mercy, more joy?

And you – if Jesus were to become you, with his heart, how much would you notice the difference – to your stress levels, your anxiety, your mood swings, your temper, your sleep?

If Jesus were to become you, with his heart, would you still be doing the things you are doing?

If Jesus were to become you, with his heart, would you still have the same view of your money, your career, your retirement, your death?

If Jesus were to become you, with his heart, what would change?

So, friends, how's your heart?

If you are anything like me, you'll find this challenging. It might help to know there is good news. It is deeply, wonderfully and profoundly true, that however you feel right now, in response to what is being said today, God loves you as you are! God's love is so wide and so long and so high and so deep that there is nothing you can do to stop God loving you. There is no place you can go, there is nowhere you can hide where you are outside the reach of God's magnificent love.

Psalms 139 reminds us that even in the darkest places we are never beyond the light of God's profound love. Time and time again the stories of God's people show us that God's love holds us in everything. The stories of Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Joshua, David, Ruth, Esther, Daniel, Peter and Paul to name a few, are testament to the width, length, height and depth of God's love.

Which means that however you are feeling right now, in these moments, you cannot stop God loving you.

Max Lucado writes it this way:

*God's love never ceases. Never. Though we spurn him. Ignore him. Reject him. Despise him. Disobey him. He will not change. Our evil cannot diminish his love. Our goodness cannot increase it. Our faith does not earn it, any more than our stupidity jeopardizes it. God doesn't love us less if we fail or more if we succeed. God's love never ceases.<sup>1</sup>*

God loves you because he loves you because he loves you.... But he wants to give you a new heart.

<sup>26</sup> I'll give you a new heart, put a new Spirit in you. I'll remove the stone heart from your body and replace it with a heart that's God-willed, not self-willed. (Ezekiel 36 v 26 The Message)

I've read this many times, but I wonder if it has something to say to us about our heart and God's desire to give us a new one:

*The cheerful girl with bouncy golden curls was almost five. With her mother at the checkout stand, she saw them: a circle of glistening white pearls in a pink foil box. "Oh please, Mummy. Can I have them? Please, Mummy, please!"*

*Quickly the mother checked the back of the little foil box and then looked back into the pleading blue eyes of her little girl's upturned face. "A dollar ninety-five. That's almost \$ 2.00. If you really want them, I'll think of some extra chores for you and in no time you can save enough money to buy them for yourself. Your birthday's only a week away and you might get another crisp dollar bill from Grandma."*

*As soon as Jenny got home, she emptied her penny bank and counted out 17 pennies. After dinner, she did more than her share of chores and she went to the neighbour and asked Mrs McJames if she could pick dandelions for ten cents. On her birthday, Grandma did give her another new dollar bill and at last she had enough money to buy the necklace.*

*Jenny loved her pearls. They made her feel dressed up and grown up. She wore them everywhere – Sunday school, kindergarten, even to bed. The only time she took them off was when she went swimming or had a bubble bath. Mother said if they got wet, they might turn her neck green.*

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<sup>1</sup> Lucado, M., "Just Like Jesus," W Publishing Group 1998 p 3

*Jenny had a very loving daddy and every night when she was ready for bed, he would stop whatever he was doing and come upstairs to read her a story. One night when he finished the story, he asked Jenny, "Do you love me?"*

*"Oh yes, Daddy. You know that I love you."*

*"Then give me your pearls."*

*"Oh Daddy, not my pearls. But you can have Princess – the white horse from my collection. The one with the pink tail. Remember, Daddy? The one you gave me. She's my favourite."*

*"That's ok, Honey, Daddy love you. Good night." And he brushed her cheek with a kiss.*

*About a week later, after the story time, Jenny's daddy asked again, "Do you love me?"*

*"Daddy, you know I love you."*

*"Then give me your pearls."*

*"Oh Daddy, not my pearls. But you can have my baby doll. The brand new one I got for my birthday. She is so beautiful and you can have the yellow blanket that matches her sleeper."*

*"That's okay. Sleep well. God bless you, little one. Daddy loves you." And as always, he brushed her cheek with a gentle kiss.*

*A few nights later when her daddy came in, Jenny was sitting on her bed with her legs crossed Indian-style. As he came close, he noticed her chin was trembling and one silent tear rolled down her cheek. "What is it Jenny? What's the matter?" Jenny didn't say anything but lifted her little hand up to her daddy. And when she opened it, there was her little pearl necklace. With a little quiver, she finally said, "Here, Daddy. It's for you." With tears gathering in his own eyes, Jenny's kind daddy reached out with one hand to take the dime store necklace, and with the other hand he reached into his pocket and pulled out a blue velvet case with a strand of genuine pearls and gave them to Jenny. He had had them all the time. He was just waiting for her to give up the dime store stuff so he could give her genuine treasure.*

When we have a new heart, love wins.  
When we have a new heart, we will live more like Jesus  
When we have a new heart, our words will reflect his words  
Our thoughts will reflect his thoughts  
Our ways will reflect his ways  
What we hear will reflect what he hears  
What we see will reflect what he sees  
What we seek will reflect what he seeks  
What we love will reflect what he loves  
Our priorities will reflect his priorities  
Our actions will reflect his actions  
Our decisions will reflect his decisions

Now, it may be that we've already had enough challenges in this talk, but, there's one more.

Paul writes: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Galatians 2 v 20)

Friends, if you have chosen to follow Christ, if you have committed yourself to him, then the deep and profound truth is, you already have a new heart – you already have a heart like Jesus! That's challenging because my best guess is that, like in my life, that's not always clear in your life! In my life (and those who know me and love me will tell you, this is true), it doesn't always look like I have a heart like Jesus's heart. Jesus's heart is not always reflected in the things I do, say or think. I may have a new heart, but it's not always obvious, and my best guess is that the same is true for you!

I'm wondering if part of the power of the story of the little girl with her pearls, and the reason I can keep reading it, is that it is a story we need to live out many, many times. We need to keep bringing our heart to our Father. We have a new heart but, in our humanness, there are things that get in the way of us living like Jesus.

It is wonderfully true that God loves us just as we are. But it is also wonderfully true that he loves us too much to leave us as we are.

In a couple of weeks, we are going to think about the new Vision Statement, we believe our God given Vision Statement for the next stretch of our journey

together as CBC. I think it's going to challenge us to love like Jesus. I think its going to challenge us to have a heart like Jesus.

So, over the next few weeks and months, we are going to spend time on Sunday mornings thinking about, and reflecting on, the heart of Jesus. We are going to trust that God doesn't want to leave us as we are, but that he can change and transform our hearts. We are going to trust that, as we invite God to change our hearts, we will see change in our community at CBC. We're going to trust that as God changes our hearts, so our love will grow and will flow to those outside, into the community around is in all the places we are. And we are going to trust that through the changing hearts of God's people here, we might see changing hearts in the lives of others.

And, maybe someone will write us a letter like this one:

*You know, when we met, I began to discover a new vulnerability, a warmth and a lack of pretence that impressed me. I saw in you a thriving spirit – no signs of internal stagnation anywhere. I could tell you were a growing person and I liked that. I saw you had strong self-esteem, not based on the fluff of self-help books, but on something a whole lot deeper. I saw that you lived by convictions and priorities and not just by convenience, selfish pleasure and financial gain. And I had never met anyone like that before.*

*I felt a depth of love and concern as you listened to me and didn't judge me. You tried to understand me, you sympathized and you celebrated with me, you demonstrated kindness and generosity – and not just to me, but to other people as well.*

*And you stood for something. You were willing to go against the grain of society and follow what you believed to be true, no matter what people said, and no matter how much it cost you. And for those reasons and a whole host of others, I found myself really wanting what you had. Now that I've become a Christian, I wanted to write to tell you I'm grateful beyond words for how you lived out your Christian life in front of me.*

So, friends, perhaps you'll choose to join with me on this journey – to have a heart like Jesus in the story where love wins!

Preached and Live Streamed on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> September 2021 by Rev. Ian Phillips at Crawley Baptist Church.