

Series: JESUS IS KING...SO LOVE WINS!

Sunday April 4, 2010

LOVE WINS!

1. How many of you have ever seen one of these...a cross—in a place that made you wonder, hmmm? They're all over the place, aren't they? Especially now at Easter. There are chocolate crosses, fancy gold crosses, big crosses, tiny crosses, flowered crosses. And, then, there are tattoo crosses!



-And you are likely to see some crosses in places where you would never expect



I mean, who would think that Ozzy Osbourne or Paris Hilton or Lindsey Lohan, or Tommy Lee from Motley Crue--or Rod Stewart would be wearing crosses? Even Aleister Crowley It makes you ask, "I wonder **why** they're wearing that? I wonder if they know what it **means?**"

-Before we ask that question of others—maybe need to ask that question of ourselves. Is the cross simply a symbol that Jesus paid for my sins—and now I can get into heaven? Or are there things that it means—that maybe I've missed? What does the cross mean for us—as God's people? What does it mean tomorrow—when I'm back at the cubicle farm; when I'm stuck in traffic; when I have to meet with someone—and there's some weird blood between us?

-Is God, through the cross, saying something else about life through the cross? About how to live? About what matters and what doesn't? About the choices that I make—not just on Easter Sunday—but in the 54 weeks until Easter comes again. BTW—for those of you who are counting weeks—Easter is on April **24** in 2011!

2. I spent quite a bit of time re-reading all of the descriptions of Jesus' last days—and writing down what all happened to him. The Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, have been called **records of Jesus' death—with introductions**. It's true. The

Gospels move very quickly—and when they hit the last week, it's like they go into *slo-mo*—taking up almost a third of each book.

-It's easy for people who have seen movies like **The Passion of the Christ**—and read the records of Jesus last days to become somewhat accustomed to the violence. What I would like to do is revisit those passages—because there is a trail of suffering and rejection right up to the cross.

- a. First, Jesus has been interrogated all along by the entire religious establishment—not with genuine questions, but wanting to trap and discredit Him. They interrupt his teaching to ask:

"By what authority are you doing these things?" they asked. "And who gave you this authority?" (Matthew 21:23 TNIV)

-This was not a casual question—this was their final answer. They reject Him. They see **astounding** miracles and signs—and still reject everything Jesus stands for; his authority, his motivation, his credentials—and even the source of his power.

- b. This rejection was no surprise to Jesus. But when one of his inner circle betrayed him—that went deep.

Then one of the Twelve—the one called Judas Iscariot—went to the chief priests and asked, "What are you willing to give me if I deliver him over to you?" So they counted out for him thirty pieces of silver. From then on Judas watched for an opportunity to hand him over. (Matthew 26:14-16 TNIV)

- c. -This man Jesus loved and trusted for 3 years—**sells** him—for 30 silver coins! Jesus has a final meal with his disciples—and then takes them to Gethsemane—a garden of olive trees—to pray with Him.

He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." ...Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. (Matthew 26:37-38, 40a TNIV)

-Jesus, in this experience, has come face to face with evil; he is in emotional anguish about his entire mission. Yet, when he asks his three closest friends to stay with him—and pray with him—they fall asleep. They aren't there for Him when He needs them most! His authority questioned, He's betrayed by one of his inner circle, and his closest friends aren't there for him when He needs them most.

- d. Right after that, a mob arrives—led by Judas—and hauls him off to the religious authorities, and his disciples abandon him. This court is made up of leaders who have already decided He's guilty. They scrounge around until they find the

evidence they're looking for. Once they condemn Him to die, all the pent-up hatred they had for him poured out.

Then they spit in his face and struck him with their fists. Others slapped him and said, "Prophecy to us, Messiah. Who hit you?" (Matthew 26:67 TNIV)

- e. It gets worse. Peter, his closest friend, is watching all this go down from a distance. But he gets cornered twice by servants—and denies even knowing who Jesus is. Finally:

After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, "Surely you are one of them; your accent gives you away." Then he began to call down curses, and he swore to them, "I don't know the man!" (Matthew 26:73-74 TNIV)

-Now, catch the scene here. Jesus has been rejected, betrayed, let down by his closest friends; He gets slapped, punched, and spit on—and then His **closest** friend treats him like a totally stranger.

- f. He then gets hauled off to Pilate, the Roman governor—who **knows** He's innocent, but still condemns him to death.

Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified. (Matthew 27:26 TNIV)

When someone was flogged, their hands would be tied to a post in, their back bared—and then beaten with a whip tipped with chunks of lead, glass and iron. An early historian describes it as being **flayed to the bone**. But apparently even that didn't satisfy the soldiers:

Then the governor's soldiers took Jesus into the Praetorium and gathered the whole company of soldiers around him. They stripped him and put a scarlet robe on him, and then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on his head. They put a staff in his right hand as a scepter. Then they knelt in front of him and mocked him. "Hail, king of the Jews!" they said. They spit on him, and took the staff and struck him on the head again and again. After they had mocked him, they took off the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him. (Matthew 27:27-31 TNIV)

- g. The torture continues. Jesus carries his cross to a public place where he is stripped naked, laid on the cross, and his hands and feet nailed to it. And then the cross was put in place. Even **that's** not enough. The people passing by insult him—as do the religious professionals—telling him to come down off the cross and prove He's for real. Even the other guys being crucified with him insult Him!

-Jesus has been repeatedly punched, hit with a stick, spit on, slapped, betrayed, humiliated, mocked, beaten—and now nailed helpless to a cross

where he will suffer one of the most painful executions possible. The hatred and spite and meanness poured out on Him is unbelievable! Later he says, "I'm thirsty." He's God—and He can't even get himself a drink!

- i. The most profound part of Jesus' suffering comes right before He dies:

About three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" (which means "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?") (Matthew 27:46 TNIV)

-We sometimes talk about an intense time of suffering as **going through hell**. Hell is, very simply, the **absence** of God. In some profound way, because Jesus was carrying our sin—God abandoned Him. **That** was the culmination of Jesus' suffering. And it was just after this that He cried out, **Finished! Completed!** And died.

3. The list of what Jesus faced in the days of his life is profound: **Questioned; betrayed, deserted, denied, spit on, punched in the face, slapped, mocked, stripped naked, insulted, lied about, beaten, falsely accused, convicted, condemned, crucified, humiliated, scorned, rejected, hated, stared at, left naked in public and, finally, killed.**

-Here's the question: How did he respond to all this? He did precisely what He asked his followers to do. When he was punched, he turned the other cheek; when he was insulted, he said nothing. He didn't strike back—not even once—not even with a vengeful look.

- a. And he prayed for those who were torturing and abusing Him. When the soldiers were nailing Jesus to the cross, Jesus exact words were,

"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." (Luke 23:34 TNIV)

Amazing, isn't it? Right in the middle of the most excruciating pain—Jesus offers forgiveness.

- b. As He's hanging there on the cross, one of the narratives tells us that a criminal on one side began to taunt him; "Hey, if you're who you say you are—if you're the **man**—get us out of here too!" But the other guy, interestingly enough, says, "Hey—leave him alone! We're getting what we deserve—He's **innocent!**" Then he turns to Jesus and says, "When you come into your Kingdom, will you remember me?" Jesus could've said, "You're guilty—you're gonna **fry!**" But no, He says, "Today—**you'll be with me in Paradise!**"

-And you see this over and over again; Jesus is soft-hearted—and He seems intent on forgiving—and inviting people into the life He has. It's like being punched and slapped and spit on and beaten and nailed—drains what is in Him. **Love!**

- c. Even in the middle of his worst anguish he sees his mother near the cross—and thinks of her welfare! He asks his disciple, John, to take care of her. And in his final breath, he says: **Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!** Even when Jesus feels abandoned by the Father, He *still* trusts Him. It's like Jesus has all these holes poked in his emotions, his body and his soul—and love, invitation and forgiveness leak out of everyone one of them.

-He had a choice, you know. He was a human being. He had *all* the temptations we have when we're hurt, humiliated, and pushed to the limit. He could've spat in *their* faces, clobbered them, threatened them. When Peter went into retaliation mode, Jesus said, **Stop it!** He could've called 10,000 angels and nuked everyone involved; turned them into a quivering mass of jelly with hair. But He *didn't!* See, that's the point. He doesn't become the evil that's being done to Him. He gives love and forgiveness in exchange for evil--**every single time!**

4. And a couple of days after that horrible experience, Jesus rises from the dead. **He wins!** He is tempted in all the ways that we are—but He doesn't give in. **Not even once!** And that's what today's celebration is all about. Listen to the record:

After the Sabbath, at dawn on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to look at the tomb. There was a violent earthquake, for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven and, going to the tomb, rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothes were white as snow. The guards were so afraid of him that they shook and became like dead men.

The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."

So the women hurried away from the tomb, afraid yet filled with joy, and ran to tell his disciples. Suddenly Jesus met them. "Greetings," he said. They came to him, clasped his feet and worshiped him. Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

(Matthew 28:1-10 TNIV)

- a. Anyone remember the scene from the movie, **The Terminator**, when Arnold Schwarzenegger is not allowed into a police building and says, **I'll be back!** He keeps his promise. He drives a car through the front door of the police station!
-Think for just a minute about all the people who were involved in Jesus' betrayal, torture, humiliation and execution. If I'd been involved in having Jesus executed—or making fun of Him while He died, the thought of Him coming back to life would **not** be a good one! I'd think, "Oh, man—He's coming for me! **I'll be BACK!**"

-But that's not the way it happens. Jesus doesn't come back to get the people who mocked Him, punched Him and stripped the flesh off his back—or those

who denied him. Peter found that out personally. Peter went back to fishing—maybe because he felt like such a failure. Well, even fishing doesn't work. They get skunked—and almost as if to rub it in, Jesus is waiting on the beach, “Hey guys! How was your first day in your new career?”

-Can anyone here remember having to face someone you **really** hurt? You **dread** it! Well, Peter **really** screwed up—and Jesus is waiting on the beach! But Jesus doesn't shame Peter. He simply asks, “Peter, do you love me more than catching fish? I haven't given up on you, you know. If you'll come back—I can use you!”

- b. Jesus had told his disciples right before He died:

In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world. (John 16:33 TNIV)

When Jesus rose from the dead, **that's** what He did when He rose from the dead. Our world system is **filled** with—seeping with anger, hate, revenge and vindictiveness. The need to be right. Get even. Say the last word, throw the last knife. Jesus, by rising, says, **I win! I did it! I've overcome the whole stupid, pointless, broken system!**

-And in place of all this junk that gets into and contaminates **our** hearts, Jesus offers the **perfect** life He lived, and the matchless way He responded. If we'll have it. If we'll have **Him**. If we will embrace His forgiveness and His way—then His Spirit brings His life and power—and that cosmic shift happens in **us**. From **death** to **life!**

- c. But what Jesus did, friends, goes way, **way** deeper than that. Jesus—the Son of God--confronted evil—and won. Think about what He faced. Why do you think the hatred and contempt and betrayal and injustice he faced at every level was so profound and violent? Why, when He was already suffering, were people still venting their hatred? I'll tell you why. This, friends, was evil at a **cosmic** level—headed by Satan himself. And Jesus **won!** An early leader says:

And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. (Colossians 2:15 TNIV)

-When Jesus lifeless body hung on that cross, it **looked** like a public defeat. Satan/Romans – 1, Jesus – 0. But when Jesus walked out of the grave, it went from a **very** public defeat to a **very** public victory!

- d. What happened from Good Friday to Easter Sunday was **so** powerful, death itself was defeated. Death, Satan, and Hell—formidable enemies **couldn't keep Jesus down**. Listen to this early taunt recorded in a letter that Paul the Apostle wrote:

**"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"
The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks
be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.
(1 Corinthians 15:55-57 TNIV)**

-It's like Jesus Christ is saying, "Uh, death—I see the scoreboard—and...**you're not on it!** Grave—you kill someone—and **they just live forever with God!** Is **that** all you can do? Is **that** all you've got?" Jesus **survives** the worst that evil itself could throw at Him—and won. What weapon is **so** powerful that it can do that? Apparent **LOVE** is. Of all things!

5. Let me say it again; because Jesus Christ was a human being just like you and me—and yet looked evil in the eye in the Garden and chose **obedience**; because he was humiliated—and never retaliated; because He was accused and condemned and kept silent—because He lived out **love and forgiveness** in the face of all this—something **powerful** shifted in the universe when He walked out of that grave.

- And **now**—LOVE WINS! It can be stated as simply as that. Because God, through Jesus, defeated evil—because someone loved through the worst that anyone could face and didn't give in. Love **wins!** And now the universe has a new set of laws.

6. When Jesus walked out of the grave alive, the Kingdom of God that He talked so much about established a beachhead in our world. Like Normandy, it was an all-out offensive on **everything** that's screwed up in our world and **everything** that's screwed up in our hearts. But make no mistake—just like Normandy—Jesus resurrection totally changed the course of the battle. The church—God's new creation was born that day. This puny little group of people who celebrated in the upper room that He was alive would become a powerful army of love; of people who believe that God really is in charge, that Jesus is Lord—and that love and sacrifice and grace and forgiveness and hope is the way to win.

-And **we** are part of that ultimate victory. Oh, we sometimes don't look like much, but **we** are God's new creation; **we** are this group of Christ-followers, responsive to the **same Spirit** who raised Jesus from the dead. And **now** He lives in us.

-And, see, now **we** have that same power. The power of God that took a measly group of 120—and within 300 years took down the Roman Empire—when the only blood that was shed belonged to the people of Jesus! Want to know what God wants to do through us, the heirs of Jesus—people with the Almighty Spirit of God living in us? He wants to show, through **our** lives—that love wins. He wants, through our lives as His followers, to join Him in His mission of rescuing, reclaiming and renewing this planet one square inch, one life at a time.

-Want to know what will convince people that Jesus is alive? That He really did live, die—and rise that Easter 2000 years ago? It's not some new fantastic argument from historical and archaeological and textual data. Those evidences **do** exist—but the most convincing proof that Jesus lives—is when it's clear in **our** lives—as His Followers, filled with **His** Spirit—that love wins in us. And through us. **LOVE WINS!** And the question I **must** ask you—is—do **you** believe, to the core of who you are—that love wins the day?

- a. Maybe the first question is—has the sacrificial love of Jesus won **you**? Has it won **your** heart? You have to decide—Jesus didn't just leave that up for grabs. I have to make a decision—and so do you. Will I be a part of this Kingdom—this movement of Jesus—and submit to His leadership and His ways—and find grace, forgiveness and eternal life. Or not.

-This is not some intellectual deal—some set of facts you subscribe to. This is a decision that grabs you by the heart and rearranges your value system. And at your invitation, the Holy Spirit takes up residence inside you—and **He** is the one who pours the love in—so that when your body or emotions get pierced, crushed, or humiliated—**love** pours out. His work and His power is described simply as **fruit**—that shows itself in love, joy, peace, patience, kindness and goodness.

-The most powerful and significant decision you will ever make is whether Jesus' love will win you. Love is the most powerful force in the world—but we **can** resist it. Whenever anyone offers love, we can choose to turn it away. Have you **ever** in your life opened your heart to Jesus—and the life He gives and calls you to?

- b. For a lot of people—including the celebrities we showed at the beginning—the cross is an interesting chunk of jewelry. But it is **God's** way of saying, **Love wins**. It's the universal way of saying, "You can do **anything** to Jesus and those who follow Him—but He still overcomes it! The powers of the world that appear to be winning—lose, and the powers that appear to be losing, win. The whole system, because of Jesus, has been flipped upside-down.

- c. Whether or not love actually does win the day gets **right down into the nitty-gritty** of the decisions we make under pressure—just like Jesus. You can **say** you believe that love wins—but whether that's part of our DNA—or our marketing strategy—shows when we encounter the snubs, the digs, the pain of every day life. What's the temptation when someone does something evil to you? Like Jesus—we're faced with a choice: Will I respond with **more** evil—a better, more **clever** form of evil? Or will I choose to **overcome** evil with good? -We tend to think in grand ways—of the magnanimous sacrifices we're going to make to engage in God's mission. But God's mission, at least for starters, is the people **right around** you.

-A spouse brings up something from the past right as you're going out the door. And your mind immediately begins to work on a plan. "Hmmm. Will I bring up his ex-girlfriend—or his ex-employer—which will it be? He pushes my buttons, I'll push his!" See, if the universe hadn't been changed forever by Jesus—then I need to be **right**, I need to **win** this confrontation. But if the universe works differently—then love **wins**. But **only** if I cooperate.

- d. You're at the water cooler—and people are snickering at you—mocking you as a freak Christian. And on the office scoreboard—it would appear that you're losing. You can respond in a lot of ways—but **love** wins.

-When you're in traffic and you're frustrated, **love** wins, not honking.
 -When see a group waiting for you by the lockers—and you know what they're going to say—**love** wins. If the cross is real and Jesus did, in fact, rise from the dead, love wins. Love wins today. Love wins tomorrow. Love wins today as the family gathers for Easter. Love wins when it comes to the person nominated for the most annoying employee in the world.

- e. See, like Jesus, you're probably going to get challenged and questioned. At some point, if you live for very long, you'll get betrayed. You'll get denied; someone you thought was a friend will talk about you behind your back...take you off Facebook...make rude comments behind your back. You might get spit on, or punched, or slapped. You have choices about how you're going to respond. The Bible says, **love NEVER fails**. It **can't**. Love can be denied, brushed aside, ignored—but it is incapable of failure.

-You might be thinking, "Yeah, but you don't understand my ex!" Love wins.
 "You don't understand my boss!" Love wins. "You don't understand what they **did** to me!" Love wins. "But you don't understand my 16 year old kid!" You're right, we don't—but love **still** wins.

7. Make **no** mistake about it. Easter is the reminder that the old, hateful, mean, spiteful, vindictive, infected ways of hatred will now **lose** every time we use them or bow to them. It's love that wins the lottery. It's **love** that changes everything. Love wins. But we **forget** that. And that's why there are crosses. to remind us of the day that Jesus went through the worst—and responded in love. And now, through **His** power, **we** can do the same!