

Requiescat in Pace ~ Daniel Thomas Soso

May 31st, 2024

Isaiah 55:1-13

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

John 3:1-17

It's a powerful statement that St. Paul makes: "And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing" (1 Corinthians 13:2). How many of y'all want to be nothing? It's a pretty straightforward point, but it's also a reality that gobs of people are eager to ignore... to their detriment, theirs and those around them. You could have all sorts of shiny objects in your life, you could have diversions that even the wealthy envy, you could turn heads because of your appearance or have name recognition among your peers or a retirement plan that allows you to exhale one satisfied breath after another – but if love is absent from your life you're an empty glass, you're salt that has lost its saltiness.

Do you think that you understand love? Do you know it when you see it? Can you define it? Can you explain its origin? "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Corinthians 13:4-7). Love is not abstract. Love is a crucified Savior. Love is incarnate in the Person of Jesus Christ. Love reaches its apex, Love finds its true expression as the Son of God pours out His blood for sinners, for you and me to be forgiven, for life to triumph over death.

Daniel had a great affinity for John Wayne. How many of y'all can name at least a half dozen John Wayne movies? I have my favorites. For a young lad, one stands above the others: *The Cowboys*. Ultimately the hero, the John Wayne character, sacrifices himself for the youngsters, sacrifices himself for those under his charge. It's masculine act, paternal to the core. It's a protective act of love. It's not mushy. But in that movie, you know love when you see it. A protective love – that was Daniel Soso. Even though he was Serbian, Daniel grew up in the American milieu. Masculinity enveloped Daniel and this unique American brand of manliness was evident in him. He was a machinist at Kaiser Steel by the age of 17. Antique guns and muscle cars – Daniel resonated to the prototypical American symbols of manhood; they were in his blood. Familial responsibility goes along with being a man – providing for one's family, instilling security and character in one's children, showing devotion to one's wife that honors her as highly valued helpmate. Daniel dripped American masculinity. He was self-deprecating, highly allergic to hypocrisy, and snarky – making fun anyone who got too big for their britches.

Daniel was a "fix-it-man". He rose to be the president of the "fix-it-man" fraternity, the supervisor of his clan at Kaiser Steel. It takes industry, intelligence, and tireless perseverance to rise to that height. Success bred success for Daniel. And then Daniel met something that he couldn't fix. It was a heart-breaking encounter. Alzheimer's Disease; his beloved bride was falling victim to a mental thief and Daniel couldn't fix it. Some things are beyond our control. That's what Jesus was attempting to get Nicodemus to see. You must be born again, born from above (John 3:3). Nicodemus was dumbfounded. "How can these things be?" (John 3:9).

Nicodemus couldn't conceive of God Himself venturing into our flesh and dying on a cross to save a diseased and rebellious people. Nicodemus' stunted understanding of divine love and divine glory and divine grace prohibited him from understanding Jesus' words as the Lord spoke to him about the greatest thing this world has ever known. It is an altogether too common malady in our late day. Unbelief doesn't see God's love or God's grace or God's glory. Daniel saw it. God used what Daniel could not fix to show him the depth of eternal love, eternal grace, eternal glory.

You can't fix your sin. No one in this holy house can rectify the dismal outcome of Holy God judging sinful men. God is just. Sin must be punished. Holy God will not allow what is foul, what is profane into His presence. Who among us can generate a holiness that will satisfy God's demands, God's standards? But love, divine love calls to you. God was hunting Daniel, pursuing the sheep that is Daniel Thomas Soso like a Shepherd who had left the 99 in the open country and goes in search of the one that is lost until he finds it (Luke 15:4-7). God's ways are not our ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth so are God's ways higher than our ways. God used Beverly's Alzheimer's, God used Daniel's own heart attack and a stroke in 2019 to induce him into the Shepherd's fold, the Shepherd's church. After that health scare the Gospel plied at Daniel's heart. God was calling him: "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isaiah 55:1). That's God's grace, God's unmerited favor being poured out on the object of His love. Daniel heard of love and blood and sacrifice and righteousness and atonement and death and resurrection. The Church preaches Christ and Him crucified. And Daniel asked, in humility and wonder and hope Daniel asked: "Is this *really* for me?"

It wasn't mushy. His heart apprehended Christ's grace with amazement. Is this really for me? Daniel knew that he didn't earn it, could never "deserve" it. Love is that way – sacrificial love is that way. God loved the world in this way, that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). Is this really for me? Christians know what their sins deserve. Christians look at Christ on the cross and know, in their bones know, that a radical price was paid to open the gates of heaven. Suffering of the highest order was thrust upon One Man, the singular Man, the God/Man who was conceived for the express purpose of redeeming humanity. Jesus is the fix it Man. The Lord Christ fixed Beverly when Daniel could not. From eternity, when Beverly's name was written in the Book of Life, it was Christ and His righteousness that inscribed her name. At Golgotha, the Son of God fixed Beverly by spilling His blood and bearing her sin. Daniel saw that grace and rejoiced that his beloved wife was in Christ's hands.

The "fix it Man" stood at Lazarus' tomb. Two of the dead man's sisters had sobbed, lamented unreservedly: "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Jesus had a point to make. Jesus makes the same point at every grave, every tomb, every funeral where a believer is laid to rest. Fix your heart on His words for they make a triumphant point: "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26). Daniel did. Daniel died believing that Love had laid claim to him and because of that Love death has no sting. Love and blood and sacrifice and divine righteousness laid claim to Daniel Thomas Soso. Daniel knew it. Daniel confessed it, rested his soul in the truth of Christ's death and resurrection and

now luxuriates in the glory of heaven. Jesus raised dead Lazarus. “Lazarus, come out!” Life is the victor over death. “Jesus lives! The vict’ry’s won! Death no longer can appall me; Jesus lives! Death’s reign is done! From the grave will Christ recall me. Brighter scenes will then commence; This shall be my confidence” (Jesus Lives, The Victory’s Won – LSB 490). That faith animated Daniel’s outlook. It’s love; divine love in action; love in Christ and in His Word. Daniel sees it now fully. Daniel knows it now fully. No more seeing in a mirror dimly for Daniel (1 Corinthians 13:12). Now he sees love face to face. Daniel knows this: Love never ends.