

A Prayer of Forgiveness (1)
Luke 23:33-34

- A. The words at the cross point to the meaning of the cross.
 - 1. Understanding His words will help us understand why He went through what He did.
 - 2. Jesus thought them important enough that He fought to have the breath to say them.
- B. At least seven sayings from the cross.
 - 1. 3 in day, 4 in darkness.
 - 2. 3 of others, 3 of himself.
 - 3. Each one insightful & relevant.
 - 4. The first thing Jesus said at the cross is often used in jest or fun today, and shouldn't be.

Luke 23:33-34

33 When they came to the place called The Skull, there they crucified Him & the criminals, one on the right & the other on the left. 34 ***But Jesus was saying, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."*** And they cast lots, dividing up His garments among themselves.

[The Greek text said, "He continued to say."]

The cross is all about forgiveness through the blood of Christ (Eph 1:7; Col 1:14).

But we can't appreciate this prayer of forgiveness until we understand the place where it was offered to God, & that place was Golgotha.]

I. CRUCIFIXION

- A. A form of punishment the Romans borrowed from the Phoenicians.
 - 1. Other methods had been used, but this form of punishment brought a slow & painful death.
- B. We know how the victims or criminals were treated simply by reading the gospels.
 - 1. Interrogation, flogging, forced march to the place of execution, mocking along the road, removing garments, nails, sometimes a sword in the side.
- C. The victims responded by screaming, begging, cursing or arguing – ***but not Jesus.***

Isaiah 53:7

7 He was oppressed & He was afflicted, yet **He did not open His mouth**; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, & like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth.

1. Jesus died as He lived, not complaining or accusing but praying silently to His Father.

[Never a man prayed such a prayer. It could only have come from God & only He can fully appreciate its meaning. Let's look at it word for word.]

II. A PRAYER OF FORGIVENESS

A. The Address: "Father"

1. His very next prayer, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me" (Matt 27:46).
 - a. Did God forsake Jesus (2 Cor 5:21)?
 - b. It seems odd that Jesus would just now feel abandoned enough to pray about it.
 - He's been essentially alone since the night before.

- He even prayed several times in the garden, "Your will be done".

- Well, now, the Father's will was being done; how would that be abandonment.

c. Or was Jesus pointing to Psalm 22:1-11?

d. No matter, one thing is for certain, Jesus is about to make his last request.

B. The Appeal: "Forgive" – *To send away*

Psalms 103:8-13

8 The Lord is compassionate & gracious, slow to anger & abounding in lovingkindness. 9 He will not always strive with us, nor will He keep His anger forever. 10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities. 11 **For as high as the heavens are above the earth**, so great is His lovingkindness toward those who fear Him. 12 **As far as the east is from the west**, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. 13 Just as a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him.

1. But Jesus had always forgiven sins Himself (Sinful woman, Luke 7:48; Paralyzed man, Mark 2:5).

- a. In fact, He proved His right to forgive sins by healing people (Mark 2:9-10).
 - b. So why was He turning that work over to the Father?
2. As He was suspended between Heaven & earth, He was in a sense introducing His work as our Mediator with God.
- a. Jesus is the Mediator of a new covenant (Heb 8:6; 9:15; 12:24), but that covenant had not yet been established while He was still alive on the cross.
 - b. But He was introducing that work here while on the cross.

1 Timothy 2:5

5 **For there is** one God, & **one mediator also between God & men**, the man Christ Jesus, (see also Heb 4:14; 5:1-5)

- c. Jesus, here, was identifying with us, & laying aside His authority to forgive (Heb 5:1-4).

C. The Aim: "Them" – For whom is He praying?

Luke 23:34-37

34 But Jesus was saying, "**Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.**" And **they** cast lots, dividing up His garments

among **themselves**. 35 And the **people** stood by, looking on. And even the **rulers** were sneering at Him, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One." 36 The **soldiers** also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine, 37 & saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!"

- 1. Why "forgive THEM" – of all people? The ones who so consciously caused His pain?

Isaiah 53:8

8 By oppression & judgment He was taken away; & as for His generation, **who considered that He was cut off out of the land of the living for the transgression of my people, to whom the stroke was due?**

- a. They didn't have a clue as to what was Jesus was doing on that cross. They may have had an idea, but it was wrong.

Isaiah 53:12

12 Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, & He will divide the booty with the strong; because He poured out Himself to death, & was numbered with the transgressors; **yet He Himself bore the sin of many, & interceded for the transgressors.**

- b. Jesus was not asking His Father to over-look their sins; **Jesus was asking to be punished for their sins, since their forgiveness depended on it.**

D. The Argument: “For They Do Not Know What They Are Doing”

1. You see, “they” are not just murderers, they ignorant murderers.
2. Oh, some of them knew they were doing wrong (Pilate, Judas, Caiaphas, Annas).
3. But none of them knew they were serving the purpose of God in human redemption.

Acts 3:17-19 (Acts 2:38)

17 And now, brethren, ***I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also.*** 18 But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. 19 Therefore repent & return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord;

1 Corinthians 2:7-8

7 but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; 8 the wisdom which ***none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory;***

4. This mob needed forgiveness, because their ignorance did not excuse their sin.

5. Jesus was asking His Father to grant them time to understand what they had done.
6. Now, what about the person who knowingly rejects Jesus Christ, with full knowledge of His power & authority (2 Pet 2:21; Heb 10:27; Rom 2:28)?

[This prayer must have had a strong influence over the early saints, because just a few months later Stephen would have the occasion to do exactly what Jesus did at the cross (Acts 7:60).

Jesus & Stephen are not telling us that there is no place for justice against the wicked.

Stephen was reflecting the character of Jesus, & Jesus was reflecting the character of God, “I do not delight in the death of the wicked,” (Ezek 33:11). How do we feel about that?]

IV. PRAYING AS JESUS PRAYED

A. Patience & Hope.

1. If Jesus was praying for His enemies to have time to understand what they had done, then we must do the same for others.
 - a. Repentance may not come in our lifetime (it didn't for Jesus), but we must be patient & hopeful.

B. Paying The Price.

1. This prayer is against human nature, it's hard; we like to see people get what they deserve, but Jesus already paid that price for everybody.
 - a. Nobody's going to get what he deserves unless he rejects what the Lord did for him or her.
2. Forgiveness is being patient when someone has put us to the test & trusting that God will allow the time needed for that person to understand their sins against God & to turn away from them.
3. But let's not forget that someone's forgive-ness may require that we make them aware of their sins.

Galatians 6:1

6 Brethren, even ***if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one*** in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.

James 5:19-20

19 My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth & one turns him back, 20 let him know that ***he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death*** & will cover a multitude of sins.

CLOSING

A. At the cross, Jesus was demonstrating some-thing He taught throughout His life (Matt 5:44-45; 6:14-16; Mark 11:25-26).

1. But He also taught that repentance is necessary before any forgiveness would be granted by God (Luke 17:3-4).

- a. So what if there is no repentance? Have we wasted our breath to pray for them?

Not anymore than Jesus wasted His breath to pray for those who crucified Him & mocked Him & watched Him die.

- You know how I can say that?
- Because we're sitting here this morning. We who were once just as ignorant of our spiritual condition as the ones who crucified Jesus.
- Did God answer Jesus' prayer? Look at Pentecost! Look at us!
- God answered Jesus' prayer by not immediately condemning us for our sins of ignorance & by giving us time to repent.

B. We are living in a time of God's longsuffering & grace (like that 50 day grace period between Jesus' death & the preaching on Pentecost).

1. The Day of Judgment is yet to come.

2. Today is a day when God is seeking to reconcile sinners to Himself.

2 Corinthians 6:2 (Isa 49:8)

Behold, **now** is "THE ACCEPTABLE TIME," behold, **now** is "THE DAY OF SALVATION" —

2 Peter 3:14-15

14 Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, 15 and **regard the patience of our Lord as salvation**; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you,

Isaiah 55:6-7

6 **Seek** the Lord while He may be found; **call** upon Him while He is near. 7 Let the wicked **forsake** his way & the unrighteous man his thoughts; & let him **return** to the Lord, & He will have compassion on him, & to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.