

Father, Forgive Them!

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Preacher: Rev. Murdo M Campbell

[0 : 00] Well, if we could, with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling this evening, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read. The Gospel according to Luke, Luke chapter 23.

And I just want us to consider the words of Jesus on the cross. But if we read again at verse 33, Luke 23 at verse 33.

What it says, And when they came to the place that is called the skull, there they crucified him and the criminals, one on his right and one on his left.

And Jesus said, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. And they cast lots to divide his garments.

But particularly the words there where Jesus spoke, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

[1 : 06] As you know, all of our Gospel writers, Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, they all exhort and they all encourage us to come to the place which is called Calvary.

Come to the place which is called Calvary. Because Calvary is the place where this world's one and only remedy is dealt with. This world's one and only remedy for the curse and sin of death is dealt with at the cross of Jesus Christ.

The difference between eternal life and eternal death, as you know, is the cross of Jesus Christ.

The difference between being saved or being lost is the cross of Jesus Christ.

The difference between an eternity in heaven or an eternity in hell is, again, the cross of Jesus Christ. But this evening, I want us to listen in to what Jesus said from the cross.

As you know, and boys and girls, you'll now know that there are seven sayings from the cross. The first saying is what we're considering this evening, where Jesus said there in verse 34, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

[2 : 20] The second saying was to the thief on the cross who repented at the eleventh hour of his life. He said, Jesus said to him, Today you will be with me in paradise.

The third saying was out of care and compassion towards his mother, Mary, where Jesus said, Woman, behold your son. And to John he said, John, behold your mother.

And the fourth was the question that was asked in the darkness and the dereliction of death, where Jesus said, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

The fifth was a cry of torment. I thirst. The sixth was a shout of victory. It is finished. And the seventh and last saying from the cross was again a prayer, a prayer to go home to the Father's house.

We read it in this chapter, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit. So there are seven sayings from the cross, but I want us to focus this evening upon the first saying, where Jesus says, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

[3 : 31] And I want us to think about this saying just under three simple headings. Boys and girls, are you listening? The relationship, the request, and the reason. The relationship, the request, and the reason.

So first of all, the relationship. Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. The relationship, Father.

And as you know, some people, they don't have a good relationship with their father or with their parents. Equally so, some parents don't have a good relationship with their children.

And there are maybe many reasons why that may be the case. But you know, when it comes to the relationship between God the Father and God the Son, it was not only a sinless relationship.

It was an eternal relationship. It's a relationship which has no beginning and has no end. It's a relationship which is based upon and bound up in love.

[4 : 32] It's a relationship which is like their own character as God. Infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. And it's this relationship that John, the gospel writer, that he emphasizes and explains throughout his entire gospel.

where John explains to us that Jesus is not some distant deity that we need to try and reach by climbing up the religious ladder.

And John emphasizes to us that this Jesus is one who has drawn near. He's not one God among 33 million other gods, as Hindus would claim.

Jesus is not one of three beings, as Mormons would claim. He's not just a prophet, as Jews or Muslims would claim. He's not a moral example, as atheists and secularists would claim. He's not the created Son of God, as the Jehovah Witnesses would claim.

No. John tells us, and all the gospel writers tell us, that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. He's the only Savior. And He's the only substitute for sinners such as we are.

[5 : 39] And as John tells us in the opening chapter of his own gospel, in his prologue, he tells us that this Jesus, hanging upon the cross, is the Word.

He is the Word who was with God, and was God, and still is God. Because all things were made through Him, and without Him there was nothing made that was made.

But the wonder of the gospel is that that eternal Word became flesh, and dwelt among us. And He dwelt among us. He humbled Himself from the crown to the cradle to the cross, and He dwelt among us so that we would behold His glory, and see that His glory is the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

And throughout His gospel, John emphasizes, and he keeps explaining, this relationship between the Father and the Son. And he says that Jesus is one with the Father.

He records what Jesus says in John 10, I and the Father are one. He records what Jesus says about the Father is in me, and I am in the Father.

[6 : 56] As the Father knows me, so I know the Father. He talks about this relationship all the time between the Father and the Son. And John tells us that He is co-eternal with the Father.

He's co-equal with the Father. He's actually face-to-face with the Father. That's the relationship between the Father and the Son. And that's the relationship we need to understand that is being expressed here in this prayer on the cross.

There's a relationship. Because Jesus is eternally begotten of His Father. He's the only begotten of the Father. He's the only begotten Son.

He's the only begotten Son. And we're familiar with that phrase, aren't we? Because we learned it as children. We learned, John 3, 16, that God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.

God so loved the world. He had agape love for the world. Not eros love, which is romantic love. Not storge love, which is family love.

[8 : 06] Not philia love, which is friendship love. But God had agape love, selfless love. Sacrificial love. Substitutionary love.

God the Father so loved this world that He gave His only begotten Son. His monogynese. I love that word.

Monogynese. His one and only Son. His unique Son. His special Son. His incomparable and irreplaceable Son.

His monogynese. His one and only Son. His only begotten Son. And you know, you look at Calvary. And what's remarkable about this relationship between God the Father and God the Son is that it pleased the Father to crush Him.

It pleased the Father to wound Him for our transgression. It pleased the Father to bruise Him for our iniquities.

[9 : 10] It pleased the Father to receive our chastisement to give us peace. It pleased the Father that His Son would bear our griefs and carry our sorrows all the way to Calvary.

It pleased the Father to make His only begotten Son. His one and only Son. His unique Son. His monogynese Son.

And it pleased Him to make Him to be sin for us. Even though He knew no sin. All so that we. That we could be made the righteousness of God in Him.

And you know, my friend, you look at Calvary tonight. You look at what Jesus is saying there from the cross. And you know, I look at it and you know, I'm reminded of what Stuart Townend wrote.

That wonderful hymn. How deep the Father's love for us. How vast beyond all measure. That He should give His only Son and make a wretch His treasure.

[10:20] You know, the Father so loved us that He gave His only begotten Son. The Father selflessly sent His Son. He sacrificed His Son.

He substituted His Son. The Father declared His love and demonstrated His love towards us through the death of His own Son. So that when we come tonight in the 21st century and survey the wondrous cross upon which the Prince of Glory died, we see that this love, this love at Calvary, it demands our soul.

It demands our life. It demands our all. You know, that's why John the Apostle, he said, Behold, look at the cross.

Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the children of God.

And you know, in many ways, that's what Jesus is praying here as part of His relationship with His Father. He's requesting that we will enter, that we will experience, that we will enjoy that same relationship with God as our Father.

[11:41] His relationship leads to a request. And that's what we see secondly. So the relationship and the request.

Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

And you know, Jesus, He could only make this request to His Father because of the relationship which He had with His Father. And Jesus made this request because He knew that the Father loved Him.

As Jesus says, He says in the Gospels, As the Father loved me, so have I loved the Father. Abide in my love. And Jesus says, Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

So my friend, Jesus could only make this request Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. He could only make this request to His Father because of the relationship with His Father.

[12:47] And you know, even as we were looking earlier on, on singing in Psalm 89 about this eternal covenant, the eternal covenant of redemption, where there was this conversation between the Father and the Son.

And it always reminds me of that imaginative conversation that the 17th century Puritan John Flavel, he wrote in his works this wonderful conversation between God the Father and God the Son as they entered into this covenant of redemption.

And Flavel, he imagines the Father speaking to his Son and saying to his Son, Jesus, saying, my Son, here, here, here is a poor company of miserable souls that have utterly undone themselves and lie open to my justice.

What shall be done for these souls? And Flavel says that the Son responds. The Son responds and says, O my Father, O my Father, such is my love and pity for them that rather than they perish, I will be responsible for them.

Upon me, my Father, upon me be all their debt. And the Father says, but my Son, if you undertake for them, you must pay the last penny.

[14:08] Expect no discounts from me. If I spare them, I will not spare you. And the Son replies and says to his Father, Father, I am willing. Let it be so.

Charge it all to me. I am able to pay their debt, and though it will undo me, though it will impoverish all my riches and empty me of all my accounts, yet I am content to do it.

And you know, that's what happened. The Father granted his Son's request. The covenant was made, and the covenant was revealed at the cross.

Because as Paul says, though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might become rich.

And you know, this is the wonder of Jesus' request here. It was all because of his relationship with his Father. A wonderful relationship, an eternal relationship relationship, where Jesus knew his Father so intimately, so personally.

[15:14] He knew his Father to be, as he describes in the Gospels, a holy Father, a righteous Father, a good, good Father.

He is described as the Father of lights, the Father of mercies, the Father of truth, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. And you know, it's through his relationship with Jesus.

It's through the relationship between the Father and the Son that Jesus is enabled to make this request. Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

But you know, it's because of his relationship, and because of this request, that we can enter into a relationship with God, and that we can address him and call him our Father, which art in heaven. And it's through that relationship, it's through that redemption, that we can experience and enjoy reconciliation and restoration.

[16 : 21] Because, as the Bible reminds us, Jesus is our advocate with the Father. Jesus is our mediator between God and men. Jesus is our great high priest, whoever lives to make intercession for us.

And that's why Jesus made this request. Father, forgive them. Father, forgive them. And of course, the them, it's not specific, is it?

He doesn't describe who the them is. Jesus isn't specific, and for good reason, because, well, we're included in the them. It's not just the religious leaders and the Roman soldiers and the railing criminals at the cross.

No, we're part of this prayer too. Father, forgive them. Father, forgive them. Jesus is praying for us. And this is what we must always see. Jesus is praying for us at this point. But He's praying for us as His enemies. He's praying for us as His enemies.

[17 : 34] And that's what the Bible reminds us, that while we were still enemies of the cross, while we were still enemies of Christ, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

He prayed for us, and He died for us. He prayed for us, Father, forgive them. Forgive them. You know, even if you put your name there, remove the them. Put your name there. Forgive Myrdo. Father, forgive Myrdo.

because He knows not what He's doing. While we were yet sinners, Christ prayed for us and died for us. Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

But you know, when we hear this request from Jesus, we have to realize that, boys and girls, you're listening, two Ps. Jesus not only practiced what He preached, He also practiced what He prayed.

[18 : 39] Jesus not only practiced what He preached, He also practiced what He prayed. And we know that Jesus practiced what He preached because He preached in the Sermon on the Mount. He preached, love your enemies.

Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you. So Jesus practiced what He preached because there's no one more loving than Jesus.

and He loved us all as His enemies. But Jesus also practiced what He prayed. He prayed for His enemies. He prayed for those who mocked Him and scourged Him and flogged Him and beat Him and spat upon Him and crucified Him.

He prayed for them. He prayed for those whose sin put Him on the cross, your sin and my sin. He prayed for us. He prayed for His enemies. Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.

Jesus practiced what He preached and He practiced what He prayed. Which ought to emphasize to us as Christians, we are to imitate and emulate Jesus.

[19 : 50] We need to practice what we preach and we need to practice what we pray. We need to practice what we preach and practice what we pray.

We preach a sermon with our Christian lives, but we're also to practice what we pray. Especially because, as you know, we all say the Lord's Prayer.

We all pray the words of the Lord's Prayer, Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

Therefore, as those who have been redeemed and reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, as those who have received that spirit of adoption, as those who have entered into that relationship with God where we call Him our Father which art in heaven, as those who have been adopted and accepted into the family of God, as those who have been named and numbered as the children of God.

And in the words of John Calvin, as those who have God as their father, the church as their mother, Jesus as their elder brother, and every other Christian as their brother and sister in Christ, as those who are part of our church family where we're to love one another and look after one another and

care for one another and show compassion and concern towards one another and bear one another's burdens and be prayerful and practical and pastoral in our care for one another.

[21 : 17] As those in our church family, Jesus has taught us to pray as a family, our Father which art in heaven. And that's why we pray the Lord's Prayer every Lord's Day as a church family.

We pray those words, our Father which art in heaven. But as Jesus teaches us here, we're also to practice what we pray. Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.

And you'll remember that there's a footnote to the Lord's Prayer when Jesus preached it in the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, just at the close of the Lord's Prayer, if you forgive others their trespasses, your Heavenly Father will also forgive you.

But if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses. I know it's a solemn footnote.

[22 : 24] It's a solemn statement which ought to remind us and even reinforce to us the purpose and the power of forgiveness. Because as those who have come to experience and to enjoy the full and free forgiveness of God in Christ, our Bible teaches us and tells us that we are to forgive one another as God in Christ has forgiven you.

Forgive one another as God in Christ has forgiven you. Therefore, if there's someone in our church family or in our personal family or someone in our life that we're not talking to or we're avoiding, because of friction or faction or feud or fallout, then we need to seek reconciliation.

We need to seek restoration in our relationship with them. We have to seek it. We might not get it, but our responsibility is to seek it.

Because as Jesus teaches us, if we have been reconciled and redeemed and restored in our relationship with God through Christ, then we should seek and we should show reconciliation and restoration in our relationship with one another.

And that's not easy. I'm not saying it is. But the Bible says it's essential. It's not easy, but it's essential.

[24 : 06] It's not easy to be the one to say sorry, but it's essential. It's not easy to show forgiveness, but it's essential.

It's not easy, but it's essential. And it's essential because, you know, I believe that we shouldn't pray the Lord's Prayer and we shouldn't sit at the Lord's Table until we first of all seek reconciliation and restoration in our relationships with one another.

The Bible teaches that. The Bible talks about that very clearly, that we should seek reconciliation and restoration in our relationships, not only our relationship with God, but also our relationships with one another.

But, you know, sadly, what we often do, and we can all be guilty of it, is that we ignore it and we hope it'll just go away. We'll forget about it.

We let these feuds and these fallouts fester, maybe even for years. But as you know, my friend, you know, I often think about it standing over a grave.

[25 : 18] I often think life's too short. for holding grudges. Life's too short for feuds and fallouts and faction and friction. That's why we must practice what we pray, just as Jesus practiced what He prayed.

And what did He pray? What a prayer. Father, forgive them. It wasn't easy, but it was essential. Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

And so we see the relationship with the Father. We see the request, forgive them. And then lastly and briefly, the reason. The relationship, the request, and the reason.

The reason. Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. For they know not what they do. You know, when we consider how Jesus came to be crucified at the cross at Calvary, there's a sense in which those around the cross did know what they were doing.

They knew exactly what they were doing because the religious leaders, they had planned and they had plotted this moment for years. They knew exactly what they were doing.

[26 : 42] The Roman soldiers, they were all experts in what they were doing. They were experts in the art of crucifixion. They knew exactly what they were doing in crucifying these three men upon a cross. And the railing criminals who had been criminals all their life mocking Jesus, well, they knew exactly what they were doing.

They were doing what they'd always been doing. There's a sense in which they knew exactly what they were doing. But Jesus knew them.

And that's the thing about Jesus. He knows us better than we know ourselves. And as Jesus says clearly, they didn't know. Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.

Forgive them for they know not what they do. They didn't know what they were doing because they acted in complete ignorance. They ridiculed and rejected Jesus in complete ignorance.

And that was highlighted later on to them. After the death and resurrection of Jesus, after Pentecost had taken place, Peter is preaching in the book of Acts and he says to the religious leaders, you delivered Jesus over and you denied him in the presence of Pilate and you killed the author of life and you acted in complete ignorance.

[28 : 01] You didn't know what you were doing. But the amazing thing is, he says, God did. God did because Jesus was delivered up, he says, according to the definite and determined plan of God.

Therefore, what is the response? Peter says, repent and be converted that your sins may be blotted out. Repent and be converted that your sins may be blotted out.

You did it in ignorance, but the gospel is telling you, repent and be converted that your sins may be blotted out. Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.

They acted in ignorance. They acted in ignorance. And you know, people often say, well, ignorance is bliss. Ignorance is bliss.

But not when it comes to the cross. And you know, my friend, my unconverted friend, whether at home or here this evening, the thing is, you're not ignorant.

[29 : 19] You're certainly not ignorant. You're not unknowing or unaware or uninformed. You don't lack knowledge on this subject, this Savior, or this salvation.

You may refuse, you may reject Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. You may be indifferent, but you're not ignorant. You are not ignorant because you know.

This is the thing, you know. You know the reason Jesus was betrayed and beaten. You know the reason Jesus was mocked and maligned.

You know the reason Jesus was crucified at Calvary. You know the reason the sun was darkened and that sin was dealt with. You know the reason Jesus experienced hell descending into his soul. You know the reason Jesus died the death you deserve to die. Because, my friend, and this is the wonder of the cross, and I hope and pray we never lose sight of it.

[30 : 28] You know the reason because you're the reason. You're the reason. You're the reason. And this is what we need to see and understand.

You know, never mind anyone else. Never point the finger at anybody else. You're the reason for the relationship between God the Father and God the Son. You're the reason for the request upon the cross.

Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. You're the reason for redemption. You're the reason Jesus prayed. You're the reason Jesus cried out.

You're the reason Jesus bore your sin in his body upon the cross. You're the reason Jesus prayed, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.

You're the reason because you're a sinner in need of the Savior. You're the reason because you're fallen and in need of forgiveness. You're the reason because Jesus was praying for you before you ever came to know him.

[31 : 37] You're the reason Jesus prayed, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.

Therefore, as Peter said to his unconverted friends in the first century, he says to you again as an unconverted friend in the 21st century, repent.

Repent. Repent and be converted. Repent. That's to turn away from your life as it is and turn to Jesus.

That's what it means to repent, to turn around, to be converted, to turn away from sin and turn to the Savior, to turn from death to life, from the dungeon to liberty, from darkness to light.

Repent and be converted that your sins may be blotted out because the relationship, the request, and the reason for redemption is you.

You are the them. You are the them. Oh, you are the them. Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.

[32 : 55] Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. you are the them. Well, may the Lord bless these thoughts to us.

Let us pray. Oh, Lord, our gracious God, may we give thanks to Thee for the wonder of salvation, that salvation was thought out in eternity, that it was realized in time, and that it is even presented to us in the present.

we thank Thee, O Lord, for the wonder of Jesus, that He became flesh and dwelt among us, but more than that, from the cross He prayed for us, that we are the them, and we thank Thee for His prayers, that He prayed for us, that He thought of us, that He considered us, and said, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

Oh, we bless Thee for Thy salvation. Help us, we pray to realize that it is a full and a free offer, an offer of forgiveness. Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

Bless Thy truth to our souls. Oh, Lord, remind us, and You this evening, that as children of God, we have received a great, a great experience, a great adoption to be brought into the family of God.

[34 : 24] And Lord, our longing is that more and more would come, that they too would taste and see that Thou art good, and trust in Thee, and be blessed.

Hear us then, we pray. Lead us into a new week, O Lord, and keep us by Thy Spirit, for we ask it in Jesus' name, and for His sake. Amen. Well, we're going to bring our service to a conclusion this evening by singing the words of Psalm 103.

Psalm 103, it's in the Scottish Psalter, page 369. Psalm 103, singing from verse 8 down to the verse marked 13.

A psalm that's very familiar to us, but a psalm that reminds us that the God we worship is a gracious God. He doesn't deal with us as we deserve, but He deals with us in love, in grace, and in mercy. And that's what we're told in verse 8. The Lord our God is merciful, and He is gracious, long-suffering and slow to wrath, in mercy plenteous.

[35 : 37] And we'll sing down to the verse marked 13. Such pity as a father hath unto his children dear, like pity shows the Lord to such as worship Him in fear.

We'll sing these verses of Psalm 103 to God's praise. The Lord our God is merciful, and He is gracious.

who will appear to be and need his children dear, as our God will be glorious and he will not continually, nor keep his anger still.

With us he did not as we sinned, nor did we quite our ill.

For us the heaven in its height, the earth surmounted far.

[37 : 18] So great to those that to him fear his tender mercies are.

As far as he sits distant from the west, so far as he, from us removed in his love all our iniquity.

Such pity as a father of love to his children dear.

Like pity shows the Lord to such as worship him in fear.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen.